PORTRAIT OF MRS. W.

A Play by the author of "The Piper"

Josephine Preston Peabody

Woven about the vital and picturesque personality of Mary Wollstonecraft, and with Robert Southey, Mrs. Siddons, John Kemble and William Godwin as other characters, this play vividly brings to life a woman whose meteoric career was one of the wonders of the eighteenth century.

THE SINGING MAN

BY

JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

"When the world of work shall be a world of song. — This is the prayer and the prophecy of one of our native American singers in what I am disposed to consider the noblest poem of this century — one of the noblest of all the centuries — 'The Singing Man' by Josephine Preston Peabody."

— *Dr. Washington Gladden.*

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Josephine Preston Peabody

(Mrs. Lionel S. Marks)

PORTRAIT OF MRS. W. With frontispiece.

HARVEST MOON.

THE WOLF OF GUBBIO: A Comedy in Three Acts.

THE SINGING MAN.

THE PIPER.

THE BOOK OF THE LITTLE PAST. Illustrated in color.

THE SINGING LEAVES.

MARLOWE: A DRAMA.

FORTUNE AND MEN'S EYES.

OLD GREEK FOLK STORIES.

PORTRAIT OF MRS. W.

Photograph by Emery Walker, Ltd.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

From the painting by John Opie in the National Portrait Gallery, London

Portrait of Mrs. W.

A Play in Three Acts with an Epilogue

By Josephine Preston Peabody

Author of "The Piper," etc.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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Foreword

This play attempts to bring into close range a name and a face.

Dramatically, it is wilfully built against traditions of stage structure. But the plea of all that Mary Wollstonecraft had to leave unsaid and undone, the tragedy of death at the hour so looked to for deeds, or utterance, that clamor of unfulfilment, made it impossible for this chronicler to deal with the story according to its more obvious stage possibilities.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born the 27th of April, 1759. She was the eldest daughter in a large family, harassed and saddened from their earliest youth by their father's intemperance and brutality and the poverty which it brought upon them. The mother, whose embittered days were forever scarred upon her daughter's heart, died in 1780, and soon the father sank to such depths that his three daughters were forced to leave him and seek home and livelihood elsewhere.

Eking out with sheer character the wants of

her underfed intellect, Mary, a girl of striking beauty and rich personality, gave herself with generous devotion to supporting her sisters and brothers. For the next few years she was absorbed in tasks uncongenial to youth of such rare promise until, by way of translations from the French and other hack work, her genius found its natural vent in literary expression. An early pamphlet on the *Education of Daughters* showed how her own unhappy experience was dominating her thought.

In 1792 appeared *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the work with which her name is always associated.

This book, a protest against the assumption that woman is only a plaything of man, asserts that intellectual companionship is the chief and the only lasting basis for happiness in marriage. The plainness of her speech and her plea for equal education of the sexes provoked more censure than praise. She was accused, though unjustly, of attacking not only the institution of marriage, but also orthodox religion, especially by those who had not read the book, as Horace Walpole, who called her a "philosophizing serpent" and a "hyena in petticoats."

Notwithstanding, the book had wide fame, both at home and abroad, was translated into German and French, and is now recognized as the pioneer work in the enfranchisement of woman.

In December, 1792, she went to Paris, then in the first throes of the Revolution. There, she met Gilbert Imlay, late captain in Washington's army, and there in the days of the Terror she was living with him as his wife. Whether the omission of the marriage rite was due to principle, or to the danger in those perilous days of a ceremony which would oblige her to proclaim herself a British subject and thereby risk imprisonment or perhaps death, or to her life-long contact with the unhappy marriages of her mother, her sister, and others — marriages from which the law permitted no escape — can no longer be known. One thing he who runs may read; her letters to Imlay. Of all things in the records of joyous self-deception, there are few to match the tragedy of the progress from the jubilant voice of a blithe young wife, a triumphant and tender mother, to the dumb, unreconciled agony of realization at the end, and her frustrated attempt at suicide.

For all her heroism, with all her beauty and

with all her gifts, self-wasted on a libertine! And her little daughter, to eyes of others, a reproach! And herself, the author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman!*

So ended the tempest of that brief romance. But the undying courage that drew her back to life, with her sense of the quest that faces all humanity — especially bewildered womankind — this spirit it is which sheds a light upon the brief term of her history. None can now doubt her height of heart, or the ardor of faith and generosity with which she threw into the moral scales of Life, herself, and her whole nature, even as men give themselves to war.

That she read the noblest meanings into the coldness of Godwin's mind at this hour of rebound was the natural thing for a tortured spirit. That his love for her let a sudden burst of glory in upon his unsuspecting imagination, none can doubt. What might they not have done together, for each other and for the world, if she had lived to interpret life for him and for herself! But one thing cut off all their theories, their deeds undone, their words unsaid; and that was death.

To Godwin the end of everything!

To the author of this play, Mary Wollstonecraft is, first and last, a being richly human, a girl untimely old in cares disproportionately assumed by her abounding courage where they were not forced upon her. The truth of her — for those who had not seen her face to face — was buried beneath a landslide of unpractised theories and ideals beyond the reaches of her time, but aimed with such young wistfulness at heights of Life; a landslide of failure and rash youth.

And the youngness of her Mary, her child and Godwin's, and of Shelley, that day in late July, 1814, in Mr. Godwin's study in Skinner Street!

When Mary was sixteen!

J. P. M.

27 February, 1922

SCENES

LONDON IN 1796 AND 1797

ACT I

Mr. Opie's Painting-Room in Berners Street

ACT II

29, The Polygon, Somers Town

ACT III

The Same, Autumn

EPILOGUE

Mr. Godwin's Study in Skinner Street, 1814

CHARACTERS

JOHN OPIE . . . . The Painter
JOHN KEMBLE . . . The Actor
ROBERT SOUTHEY . . Before he was Laureate
JAMES WILSON . . . Of Delaware, U.S.A.
TOM
MR. SYMES
WILLIAM GODWIN . . Author of *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*
AMELIA ALDERSON
MRS. SIDDONS . . . Our Tragic Muse
MRS. INCHBALD . . . Author of *A Simple Story*
UPPIE
MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT Author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

IN ACT III

DR. FORDYCE
MR. CARLISLE

IN THE EPILOGUE

MARY GODWIN
YOUNG MR. SHELLEY

Portrait of Mrs. W.

Act I

A Spring afternoon in London, 1796.

Mr. Opie's *painting-room in Berners Street.*

A large panelled studio, with a row of casement-windows on the right,[1] *and a door to the outer hall below them. — Another door, left, up. In the centre, up, a model-stand with a seat; tapestry behind it. Right, centre, an easel, back to the audience, and several canvases standing against it, their faces concealed. Left, centre, a large table with a few books and painting things upon it. Right, a small table with a few books. Down, left, a long seat.*

Mr. John Opie *is still surveying his canvas with severe scrutiny. He has on a painting smock, and his palette is in his hand.*

[1] Right and left are from the spectator's point of view.

His boy servant, a raw youth of fourteen, dogs him with a certain fascinated awe, apparently scenting some ulterior purpose for MR. OPIE'S *afternoon. . . .* OPIE *crosses to the windows.*

He pushes open the casement. — A near church-bell strikes four; to his evident satisfaction. — He leans out and looks into the street. — There is a chorus of Spring street-cries:

'Lavender, sweet lavender! . . . Fair fresh cherries, fair fresh cherries! — Sixpence the pound. — Buy my posies! — Fresh posies! — Lavender, lavender! — Fair — fresh — Cherries: — sixpence the pound! — Posies! — Cherries — Cherries!' —

OPIE *takes a coin from his pocket and flings it out of the window to some one below, with a smiling gesture: then turns to the boy,* TOM.

OPIE

O: — bring them in, Tom. . . . Persons of worship coming, to-day.

(*Exit* TOM.)

(OPIE *helps himself into his coat, and is touching up his stock and his unpowdered queue, rather anxiously, when* TOM *reënters with a nosegay of vio-*

lets. — OPIE *points to his discarded painting tools, and while* TOM *removes them carefully, he pours water into a bowl, arranges the violets, thinking happily, and surveys the room and its foreground, picturing it with a special guest in mind.* TOM *watches him open-mouthed.*)

OPIE

More chairs.... (TOM *starts for the door, left.*) No, come back.... Bring that small, low chair, with the green cushion ... and arms (*gesticulating. Smiling at* TOM's *astonishment*).... Persons of worship, Tom.

TOM

Muffins, sir?

OPIE

Muffins, of course.

TOM

If she comes by herself, sir ...

OPIE

Ah! —

TOM

Shall I bring her up here, sir?

OPIE

The green chair, quick! — (*Exit* TOM, *left.*)

(*Enter, right,* AMELIA ALDERSON *with a pottle of cherries in a lace handkerchief, under her arm.*)

Ah! —

(*They look at each other with frank enjoyment.* AMELIA *all mirth for the moment, then gazes about the studio, ignoring him.*)

AMELIA

What, no one here?

OPIE

You. —

AMELIA

No one here at all! — And this street was to be twinkling with lanterns; and brocades trailing from the windows; and waits to be singing, in May — or June — or whatever it was, that day when first I came to the painting-room of the Cornish wonder. — Oh, here you are!

(*Curtsies to him.*)

(*Reënter* TOM *with two chairs*)

OPIE

We were watching for you, — Tom and I. —

For you, and that friendly dish of talk and tea.

AMELIA

But where's the tea?

OPIE

Bring it, Tom. — (*He places the chair with the green cushion for* AMELIA *and stands regarding the composition. Moves the bowl of violets nearer to the lady.* TOM *stands observing this, tranced.* OPIE *lays his hand on his shoulder.*) And the muffins. —

(*Exit* TOM. — OPIE *studies his arrangement.* — AMELIA *breaks the spell by uncovering her pottle and holding out the cherries.*)

AMELIA

Not a word about cherries! Look, I've brought an offering: from just outside your own door, and such a dear rosy old woman. — Gaze — taste — no, wear them! There's that something a little savage about you, — aboriginal. How would you look with ear-rings? — Let me try before the others come.

OPIE

The others?

AMELIA

All here in a moment. — Heavens, did n't you ask me to bring Mrs. Inchbald . . . if I must? And must n't I? — Dear creature! And her s-s-stammer with her! And did n't that bring Mr. Kemble? And would n't it have brought Mr. Holcroft but that he's working desperately on his tragedy? Oh, oh, — quick: before they come, tell me if this is true I heard the other day.

OPIE

No, certainly not. — But say it.

AMELIA

That Mr. Holcroft is in love with Mrs. Inchbald; — Mrs. Inchbald with Mr. Godwin; yes, Mr. Godwin, the author of 'Political Justice'; Mr. Godwin is in love with — Ah, let me see, where was I? —

OPIE

You know very well.

AMELIA

Very well, Mr. Godwin with Miss Alderson. — That I heard. But you know, the odd part of it is, — that he *is not;* he is not in love with me at all! Oh, the surprise, — the novelty of it! — Well, laggard sir?

OPIE

I'm thinking.

AMELIA

That is not at all the proper reply to me, an only child . . . away from Norwich . . . on a visit.

OPIE

There are a plenty of men in love with that only child, a-visiting from Norwich. But William Godwin is not one of them.

AMELIA

He showed me some pretty manners, though. But — who's he in love with?

OPIE

And I have no manners forsooth.

AMELIA

Not as many as a bear. . . . Uncouth you are; Mrs. Inchbald says so. (*Loops cherries over his ears, like ear-rings.*) Now you look like Othello. — Tell me (*sagely*): *Who has cast the spell over William Godwin?*

OPIE

Don't waste these moments on William Godwin. You must see the difference, little blue lady.

AMELIA

Blue stocking? Surely I don't deserve that. Such a few small stories. . . .

OPIE

And may they some day be longer and larger!

AMELIA

Bear!

OPIE

But it is n't of stockings I'm thinking.

AMELIA

Quaker!

OPIE

It is still that first sight that I had of you, in the doorway, — but just newly come; in that blue . . . that blue frock; and your shoulders and your hair. . . .

AMELIA

— Almost the color of Mary Wollstonecraft's hair —; only blonder.

OPIE

Lighter, brighter. — And you wore three little white feathers. . . .

AMELIA

My three feathers! — You did n't remember the three!

OPIE

Yes . . . there were —

(*Enter, right,* MRS. INCHBALD)

— there were too many feathers.

AMELIA

This is no way to speak to an only child so far away from Norwich. — Dear Mrs. Inchbald!

(OPIE *removes the cherries from his ears and greets her gravely.*)

MRS. INCHBALD

Do you make love to all your sitters, Opie?

AMELIA

Oh, I have n't even sat for him yet! — Look: (*Pointing to the cherries.*) sixpence the pound: but they're cheaper in Norwich. . . .

MRS. INCHBALD

And the portrait.

AMELIA

Yes, we were just coming to that.

OPIE

It's but half done. She would see it, this afternoon.

AMELIA

(*darting towards the hidden canvas*)

Of course I would. — Go home to Norwich in two days more, and go without a glimpse of her portrait?

OPIE

Unfinished, as I've told you.

AMELIA

And not to be finished ever, without advice from me!

OPIE

I had almost given it up.

AMELIA

Give up that adorable creature? Nothing I ever saw in all this world . . . of all the little I have seen! — that did not disappoint me, but two things. Guess.

MRS. INCHBALD

What then?

AMELIA

The Cumberland lakes; and Mary Wollstonecraft! . .

MRS. INCHBALD

But why do you still call her Mary Wollstonecraft?

AMELIA

Mrs. Imlay, if you will, then.

(*Reënter* TOM *with preparations for the tea-table.* MRS. INCHBALD *crosses him, laughing.*)

MRS. INCHBALD
(*to* TOM)

'Peter, my fan! My fan, Peter!'

TOM

You had no fan, ma'am, that I know of.

OPIE
(*motioning* TOM *away, smilingly*)

Ladies, you are her friends, are you not? I could beg you, be true to her in this. She is the truest-hearted champion you ever had.

MRS. INCHBALD

— It will be so useful to remember that, dear Opie; when I need a champion. Do go on.

OPIE

She was sitting for me: I had begged it. And I began this. But I cannot go on with it, till her face and her heart are . . . further from that shadow.

MRS. INCHBALD

What shadow? . . . Oh, Mr. Imlay's shadow.

OPIE
(*doggedly*)

Yes, Imlay.

MRS. INCHBALD

So recent a widow!

OPIE

Her history is full of sorrow, madam; personal grief and disaster coming close upon the dire scene of the revolution in France; where — as you must have heard, she met Mr. Imlay . . .

MRS. INCHBALD

Yes, we've all heard that. And a Republican marriage it was, no doubt, if any.

AMELIA

Of course. As an Englishwoman her life would have been in danger — but Mr. Imlay was from America. Was he not?

OPIE

Yes. He had even fought in Washington's army. — He matters nothing now. — The point is only that she wrecked her hope and happiness upon a rock. She was a high-hearted woman,

looking — as most of us were looking — for a millennium to come through the French struggle; only she believed and trusted and gave her all. And he was no idealist; but a libertine.

AMELIA

(*looking on the canvas*)

. . . Ah! . . .

(MRS. INCHBALD *hastens beside her. They are silent for a moment.*)

AMELIA

(*to* OPIE, *with emotion*)

You will show them now that you can paint a woman's face. You will show them now.

MRS. INCHBALD

Droll, is it not, to think of Mr. Walpole referring to her as '*that hyena in petticoats.*'

AMELIA

Oh, you may be sure, Mr. Walpole took care never to meet her.

MRS. INCHBALD

He would do that, you know. — And after all she's certainly not a *laughing* hyena. . . .

OPIE

She has been laughing very little this year, madam.

AMELIA

Finish it, finish it. Now. At once.

OPIE

I am waiting: — for another look.

AMELIA

The look is coming. I swear it. I promise it.— I've seen it. (*Coaxingly.*) And I have seen her much lately. I can tell you this. Just now she is amazingly serene.

MRS. INCHBALD

Spring, spring! . . . Even to a desolate old turtle like me, the trees in the Park! (*Approaching the window-seat.*) But tell me, Opie. Did you ever really *see* this late-lamented Mr. Imlay? Of the United States of North America? — And is he dead? Or missing merely? And why do you look at me, you Cornish man, as if I'd said something that I should n't? — Here comes the Tragic Muse!

(AMELIA *waves her hand at the window and runs out to meet the newcomers.* OPIE *stands at the open door to welcome them.* TOM *is placing the tea-tray, up. — Reënter* AMELIA, *with* MRS. SIDDONS *and* JOHN KEMBLE, *her brother.*)

MRS. SIDDONS

Dear Opie!

AMELIA

Here's your throne. Come in, come in!

MRS. SIDDONS

Truly, the very pavements melt with Spring. John, will you tie my sandal?

MRS. INCHBALD

Now will you hear the Muse?

MRS. SIDDONS
(*greeting her*)

Elizabeth!

OPIE
(*smilingly busy with the tray*)

How does Cecilia, now?

MRS. SIDDONS
(*maternally*)

Oh, winsomely. Dark little witch!

AMELIA

Your image.

MRS. SIDDONS

Say you so? — There's an arch flatterer. She *is* like me . . . (*Thoughtfully.*) Save in her manner.

KEMBLE
(*tersely*)

Too much comedy.

MRS. SIDDONS
(*deprecatingly*)

Still, my dear Brother! . . . (*To the others.*) — She is only three!

(*Enter* ROBERT SOUTHEY *with* MR. JAMES WILSON. SOUTHEY *is a buoyant young man of twenty-two. He has a Rose, partly wrapped, in his left hand, with a Book.*)

SOUTHEY

Am I late? — Is she here?

OPIE

Three She's — and all persons of worship. —

SOUTHEY

But not Mrs. Wollstonecraft, yet. I brought her this Rose. I'm saving it. Also, I've taken the liberty to bring a new friend whom I met just now at the book-shop; a great admirer of that lady's. Mr. Wilson of the United States of America; also interested in books: in selling them. (*Bowing to* WILSON.)

WILSON

(*deprecatingly*)

The Upper Market, Wilmington, Delaware.

SOUTHEY

You'll let him see the portrait?

WILSON

It would be a privilege, Mr. Opie.

SOUTHEY

Something else. . . . (*Looks back at the door. Opens it, and returns, shaking his head.*) I've left him, somehow! — A man, a mere man. I

met him just now, yes, at Johnson's book-shop. And — without your kind permission, I told him you would let *him* see the portrait. He's a great admirer of that lady's works; that moved me. A very diffident man. 'T would give him pleasure. — His name was . . . Symes. —

(*Enter* SYMES. *He is a silent-looking, shy, youngish man; with a touch of native dignity and singularity about him: something between awkwardness and unworldliness. He stands, looking about with modest interest, till* SOUTHEY *introduces him to* OPIE.)

Ah, here you are! (*To* OPIE) Mr. Symes.

(OPIE *shakes hands with him, and leaves the two men with* SOUTHEY, *indicating that* SOUTHEY *is to show them the portrait.*)

OPIE
(*to* SOUTHEY)

You've seen it. — Come and sit at the feet of our Tragic Muse, and learn to write blank verse as it should be spoken. . . . He's a very young poet, ladies.

MRS. INCHBALD

Ah, we know Mr. Southey.

(SOUTHEY, *bowing, conducts* WILSON *and*

SYMES *up. They contemplate the portrait;* — WILSON *turns away, first, and comes down, evidently filled with admiration and expectancy.* SOUTHEY *joins the ladies at the table.* SYMES *remains up, a little way off, en silhouette, from the portrait, contemplating it alone.* MRS. INCHBALD *comes down, with her tea-cup, to the long seat, and beguiles* MR. WILSON.)

MRS. INCHBALD

I wonder how *my* little book fares in your country, Mr. Wilson . . . 'A Simple Story'? (WILSON *somewhat perplexed.*) . . . But here is Mr. Southey, all eagerness to talk with you about America; or perhaps I should say *North* America. Mr. Southey is one of our . . . very young Romanticists. (SOUTHEY, *over his tea-cup, resigns himself to this description.*) I am not aware of the names of all your interesting States; but Mr. Southey and some friends of his have — as you may not have heard — founded a colony there; yes, in the States; where all the Millennialists are going to live. (SOUTHEY *chokes with protest.* WILSON *listens, bewildered.*) The name of their community is, I think, Susquina; — no, no, — Sus-que-hanna?

SOUTHEY

The Colony was not founded, after all, Mr. Wilson.

WILSON

But we have a river, madam, by the name of Susquehanna.

SOUTHEY

Lovely name. I had heard of it. It lent itself to all our hopes of another and a better world. 'Susquehanna' . . . And most of your people read; do they not?

WILSON

(*drawing a pamphlet from his pocket contentedly*)

Watts's 'Lyric Poems'; Watson's 'Apology for Christianity'; Wollstonecraft's 'French Revolution' (only last season); and I am taking back with me her 'Letters from Norway.'

SOUTHEY

They read Mary Wollstonecraft!

WILSON

They will read anything now, Sir, by the author of 'The Vindication of the Rights of Woman!'

MRS. INCHBALD
(*to change the subject*)

And Mr. Washington remains your president till he dies?

WILSON

Mr. Washington, madam, to our great regret, declines a third term. He has just returned for a much-needed rest, to his estate at Mount Vernon.

MRS. INCHBALD

What a disappointing creature! It would have been interesting to call upon him when one joins Mr. Southey's community at Susquehanna where they — But, do tell me this; *will* they marry or will they not, Mr. Southey? Or are they merely to write verses and tend sheep? Is Philosopher William Godwin with you? And if not, why not?

SOUTHEY

No, madam, Mr. Godwin is — perhaps, too wise; and perhaps too much a man of the city. To write verses and tend sheep is, indeed, a simplified statement of our hopes.

MRS. INCHBALD

Men never do what they write about; do they? And after all, what is a Philosopher but a man who insists upon paying a shilling a pound for his cherries? So perhaps William Godwin *will* join you. — He's written with such theoretical acuteness against marriage, I vow he will end by bringing a wife with him: to till the soil of Susquehanna.

SOUTHEY

Our Susquehanna dream, Mr. Wilson, is two years old and gone by. — I would have gone: but for the simple lack of money. I remain, to till — in a sense — the soil of my own country. But in the meantime I have earned no less than seven pounds and two pair of breeches. Not amiss, dear radical Lady, after all?

MRS. INCHBALD

(*surveying him, approvingly*)

Not at all amiss. — And then, you are not counting in your book —

WILSON

'Joan of Arc' — and dedicated, I see, Sir, to Mary Wollstonecraft.

MRS. INCHBALD

You don't call her Mrs. Imlay, then?

SOUTHEY

(*loudly, with reckless enthusiasm*)

Mary Wollstonecraft stands alone. She must always, by whatever name we call her. She is as solitary as truth; shining at the bottom of the well: no parasite of marriage.

MRS. SIDDONS

How true. — And then, her Swedish letters. I was charmed, I may say, even enthralled. This latest book, dear William Godwin sent me, that alone, softened, methought, with sorrow's finger on it, gave me the fixed resolve that I must know her. And above all, her Courage! Even I, who speak for queens, — as a mere woman still, I thrill to hear this woman's heart beat high, with such devotion for her sisters, *all.* — In the next world, the women will be valued, yes, there perhaps, more than they are in this!

KEMBLE

Sarah? — And this, from You?

MRS. SIDDONS
(*prophetically*)

Yes, John! — From me. (*Shaking her head in turn, at* OPIE.) Yes, dear John Opie, yes! (*Recovering her serenity, and holding out her cup.*) . . . Delicious tea.

AMELIA
(*coming down*)

And is she not worth knowing? But, you see, some few who do not know her can be harsh enough to please the envious. You hear it everywhere her name is spoken; from strangers who resent her hopes for woman, and her condemnation of fashionable parasites, — how Mr. Walpole called her 'that hyena in petticoats.' . . .

(*Enter* MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT. — *She is bonnily dressed, a large hat tied over her heavy auburn hair; noticeably quieter than the others, in speech and motion; a touch of shadow in her voice now and then.*)

Hyena! (*Impressively.*) 'Hyena in petticoats!'

MARY

Yes, I am here. (*They turn.*) Your hyena never meant to keep you waiting.

(*There is a breeze of welcome and laughter, as*

they turn. OPIE *greets her with the quiet of an old friend, later presenting* WILSON. AMELIA *comes down to embrace her.* SYMES *disappears, up, behind canvases.*)

AMELIA

Oh, here you are at last!

MRS. SIDDONS
(*rising*)

Dear Mrs. Imlay!

(MARY *goes up to greet her; and turns back to face* SOUTHEY, *who holds out his Rose.*)

SOUTHEY

I knew you were coming. — And I've brought you a Rose.

MARY
(*taking it and putting it in the fichu of her dress, sweetly*)

A Rose. . . . What it is to be a poet, — a Young Poet! . . . And what would we older women do without you? — We shall have some talk together? Presently?

(*She turns away again to join* MRS. SID-

DONS, KEMBLE *and the others at the tea-table to which* OPIE *leads* WILSON. *They talk together.*

SYMES *looks down cautiously, apparently seeking a way out unnoticed. As* MRS. INCHBALD *comes down accompanied by* JOHN KEMBLE, *who inspects a book or two through his eye-glass,* SYMES *retreats again, among the pictures.*)

MRS. INCHBALD
(*to* SOUTHEY)

In parenthesis, who is Mr. Symes? . . . and what?

SOUTHEY
(*shaking his head*)

God knows. (KEMBLE *joins them.*)

MRS. INCHBALD

He looks a bit like Hamlet; out of work. — Not like *your* Hamlet, John. And after all, — the times can never have been really out of joint for Hamlet: he had such a ready flow of language! — John has it too: but only on the stage.

SOUTHEY

I don't know him at all: but we fell into talk at Johnson's book-shop; and I bade him along with me. I suppose it was very-young poet. Was n't it?

MRS. INCHBALD

Very, very Young-Poet. — He is something of a Quakerish Romeo, on second thought. He has an indescribable air of feeling himself in the wrong place: an always too-late manner. Yes, John, I venture — as a modest female writer, married and a widow, that man will always be too late.

KEMBLE

Elizabeth, why do you cling so to this draughty corner by the door?

MRS. INCHBALD

Draughty, on a day like this, John? Come then. Another crumpet.

(*As she leads him back to the tea-table*, SYMES *comes down hastily to* SOUTHEY.)

SYMES

A word with you, Sir, to thank you for your

kindness. I should have told you, I realize now, too late; but I — I desired so much, to see her once more; at a — distance; I mean a slight distance.

SOUTHEY

Mrs. . . . Imlay? You've met Mrs. Imlay?

SYMES

Once or twice . . . a few times, a few years ago. She would hardly recall it. In fact I know not if I dare to meet her now. But it is very much to have seen her, without . . . being a source of annoyance to her. I had the misfortune to offend that lady through the foolishest . . . inexperience. Words would fail me to tell how; much as I respect — even venerate her. — I will go, now.

SOUTHEY

(*looking keenly into his face*)

I protest. — You must take this opportunity to right yourself. Do so, Mr. Symes. She 's the tenderest soul alive, and the proudest.

SYMES

I believe that. But it is the pride alone that I've

seen . . . closely. — I'm very miserable. (*With desperate honesty.*) If you are a poet, you know what that is. (SOUTHEY *nods solemnly.*)

SOUTHEY

Go and say good-bye to Opie. Then, — *don't go!* (*He pushes him gently towards* OPIE *who comes down at that moment. They speak together, left.*)

MRS. INCHBALD

(*coming down with* KEMBLE, *who bears a bowl of cherries majestically*)

Come, Mrs. Imlay, we are going to hear this young man's Sonnet to you. Mr. Wilson says it dedicates his 'Joan of Arc' —

SOUTHEY

(*correcting*)

'Triumph of Woman!'

MRS. INCHBALD

To be sure: and before he ever saw Mrs. Imlay, romantic boy. Do repeat it, Mr. Southey. No? Perhaps John will read it, if you have a copy here . . .

KEMBLE

Elizabeth, my voice, as you seem to forget . . .

MRS. INCHBALD

Oh, John, dear, don't be so majestical.

SOUTHEY

I think I could remember it, if I were in a corner.

MRS. INCHBALD

Go in a corner then, and think it up. (*To the others, up-stage.*) Mr. Southey is going to recite his sonnet on Mrs. Imlay. Do l-l-listen.

SOUTHEY
(*to* MARY)

You won't think me impertinent?
'*The lily cheek, the purple light of love*' —
The liquid lustre of the melting eye.
Mary! of these the poet sung, for these
Did Woman triumph: turn not thou away . . .

. . . . . .

(MRS. INCHBALD *is feeding cherries to* MR. KEMBLE, *unheeding.* SOUTHEY *speaks closely to* MARY)

So! You know the rest. — There is an unhappy

man across the room. (*Indicating* SYMES.) He tells me that he once offended you. He dares not speak; but yet he longs to. Do you transfigure him; with happiness.

MARY

Could I do that?

SOUTHEY

Can any one else?

MARY

Oh, you have 'eyes of youth.' (*Lightly.*) Go. Bring him; bring him before us. — What is his name?

SOUTHEY

His name is — Symes. . . .

MARY

— Symes! — (*With a sudden dismaying recollection.*)

MRS. INCHBALD
(*turning*)

Symes! — All this fanfare at the name of a man

called *Symes*. And we, assembled in the studio of the Cornish wonder, — with the Tragic Muse, the belle of Norwich, John Kemble, — to say absolutely nothing of the authoress of 'A Simple Story.' I have n't been so humbled since I used to lunch on spring onions by the road-side, when Mr. Inchbald and I travelled with the company. 'But see, he comes. — Walk we apart.'

(*Withdrawing, as* SYMES *stands facing them.*)

MARY

(*who has recovered herself, speaks with a kindly manner that gathers composure, as of an older woman addressing a young man, though he is of like age*)

Mr. Symes. (SYMES *approaches her gravely.*)

SYMES

(*almost with awe*)

Mrs. Wollstonecraft. . . . I beg your pardon. That was the name I knew when, in my rashness, — my ignorance, — my temerity which I can hardly understand, I had the — misfortune . . .

MARY

Ah, Mr. Symes . . . it is so long ago . . . or seems so. The hardships and sorrows of a whole people have opened all our eyes to things larger than ourselves.

SYMES

That is true. Will you permit me to tell you, then, at this distance, without hope . . . and never again, perhaps, to venture so near —

MARY

(*with abashed concern*)

Mr. Symes . . .

SYMES

That when I had the audacity to — to —

MARY

Proffer me your hand, in marriage, —

SYMES

Nay, to beg for yours, — it was with all the reverence, — the adoration in the world; though it was madness in me, as I saw in a day. It was that one saving sense of my preposterous hope

that drove me to seek a messenger, rather than to speak for myself. You scarcely knew me.

MARY

True.

SYMES

(*simply*)

And yet, as Poets know, these things do happen suddenly; sometimes.

MARY

(*touched by his meekness, speaking shyly*)

Yes. It is true.

SYMES

When I learned your terrible message of scorn and grief, I saw — too late — how I had made myself misunderstood.

MARY

Oh, I did misunderstand. Forgive me that. We have so much to learn. I was younger, and very sad; and proud. Life seemed unbearably hard upon me, with burdens from other lives, not mine. I was beside myself with the effort to be stoical.

SYMES

And do you think a man could look on you, do you think a man could hear you speak, and learn unmoved of those burdens that threatened to crush your youth? . . . Could any man of feeling look on the spectacle of Genius rending the spirit of a lovely female, from within; and the thorns of this world thrust in her pathway; and keep humbly to his by-path, with no dream of being a rescuer? — Yes. I confess to you, I was a trespasser. I tried to find out all I could of your life, your trials, your natural protectors; and finding no help there, I lost my head. And if, in that state of fascinated desperation, I conceived the wild dream — that I might be blessed to lighten your destiny . . . I pray you to forgive my youth.

MARY

Oh, I see all, now. And will you not try to see, that to my tormented soul, at bay, the — the mention your . . . messenger made, . . . of your worldly possessions . . . seemed . . . seemed to me —

SYMES

An insult. Yes, you called it that.

MARY

Forgive me. Your truth-telling makes it all clear; and me so humble. If you had dared to speak, yourself —

SYMES

I was a dumb thing; an uncouth creature always; timid of himself. My downfall made me feel that I had no self to be anxious for, any longer. So I come by words more honestly.

MARY

(*simply: bewildered by his reality*)

What are you, Mr. Symes? . . . You are Something.

SYMES

Do we know what we are? But I am a very obscure person. I was thinking of taking orders, when I met you. I was an only son; with a few women-folk. It was what they desired. We had always had enough. — Then, when I saw you, and read what you had written; and understood your great thoughts struggling in this insolent world, — I knew that it was my duty to follow my conscience only; with one taper in my hand, a

little truth that lighted the world newly. — And I longed to see whatever *you* should see. And afterwards . . . I learned that you were living and thinking over the water, in those terrible days with the French. And next I heard that you were — were Mrs. Imlay. And I hoped that I might but see you, once again.

MARY

Oh, many times again. I welcome the chance to ask your pardon.

SYMES

(*much younger and happier*)

I am deeply in your debt, that you permit me to tell you the truth. Surely, happiness must be something like this.

(*Up-stage, they all rise suddenly from the tea-table and face* OPIE, *who has the canvas with her portrait in his arms.*)

AMELIA

Come, Mary!

OPIE

You have only to mount the model-stand and help my ruthless critics to an opinion.

MRS. SIDDONS

Mr. Opie waits for an Aurora Borealis, —

(MARY *goes up.* AMELIA *takes off her hat for her and pats it.* OPIE *places a chair on the model-stand, poses* MARY *in it; and then sets the Portrait on the easel, facing front.*)

SOUTHEY

You know, Mrs. Imlay, until the Americans build a new world, and that world is peopled with new women all like you, I fear you will never be forgiven for looking as you look.

OPIE

Too personal, Mr. Southey. The expression is the question.

(*Enter, by the open door,* WILLIAM GODWIN. *He pauses, — catches* MARY'S *look and silently greets her with a buoyant gesture. Her face lights, shyly.*)

AMELIA

There it is!

MRS. INCHBALD
(*turning*)

Enter, a philosopher, late and uninvited!

OPIE

Late, but long expected. Godwin!

(*The group breaks up.* GODWIN *goes up, and is greeted by each in turn.* MARY *sits, smiling; but as if she were weary.*)

MRS. SIDDONS

(*coming down*)

So late! And to my deep regret, friend Godwin, I must go, alas.

KEMBLE

And I. — Elizabeth, you will come with us, now.

(*Authoritatively, as she is saying to* TOM:)

MRS. INCHBALD

Some hot tea . . . for Mr. Godwin.

MRS. INCHBALD

(*archly*)

Must I, John? Do you think it improper — for a widow — to remain long in the company of the Author of 'Political Justice'? John, how suspicious.

KEMBLE

You and Miss Alderson are dining with us.

AMELIA

I come with you.

(*They all, including* MARY, *come down from the model-stand, taking leave of* OPIE.)

SOUTHEY

(*to* MARY)

And may I come to see you soon?

MARY

Oh, very soon, — Ah me, how dreadful of me. There 's my Fanny waiting below. How could I have left her for so long!

SOUTHEY

Let me take you both home.

MARY

I left her playing with Opie's Dorcas.

SOUTHEY

(*rushing to the tea-table*)

Let me take her a muffin: May I? Or no! These ear-rings!

(*He seizes some cherries on their stems and returns to* MARY.)

(SYMES *approaches her wistfully.*)

MARY

Mr. Symes. . . . Now that I can truly value a true friend . . . (*She inspects the cherries, and nods encouragingly to* SOUTHEY.) Tell her, Mother will come home now, very soon. We'll go together. . . . (*Exit* SOUTHEY.)

SYMES

(*with suspense*)

And 'Fanny.' . . . Is that . . . . is that . . .

MARY

It is my little girl. (*He seems stunned.*) My girl-child.

SYMES

I did not know. — I never heard that . . . I am glad indeed to learn that you have such a source of comfort . . . in your loss.

MARY

She is . . . a consolation and a strength. — Mr. Symes, I fear you have not heard all, indeed. I must not accept your friendship under any pretense. But I cannot make all my friends understand my way of thinking — nor of speaking. They *will* call me Mrs. Imlay.

SYMES

You mean —?

MARY

I did not marry Mr. Imlay. . . . I believed that faith and love were better forever through utter freedom; and *only* faith and love. But all came to an end . . . in chaos; after I had been true to that faith and that love. — Mr. Imlay is dead, you see, only to me; only to me. — And I am Mary Wollstonecraft; and that is my daughter, . . . my little girl-child.

(GODWIN *turns back from the door with* OPIE.)

SYMES

(*to* OPIE, *like a strangled man*)

I beg to thank you, Sir . . . for an afternoon . . . of revelations. — I shall hope to see Mrs. Imlay's portrait . . . again, when it is completed.

(*He bows very respectfully to* MARY, *and exit.*)

AMELIA

What a curious creature! Let him get downstairs alone, and safely. Then I'll go, too —

(*She peeps after him, and waves her hand for good-bye. Exit.*)

OPIE

Miss Alderson! — One moment. (*Exit after her.*)

(WILLIAM GODWIN *and* MARY *are left standing face to face. But she is clouded, again, by* SYMES' *evident agitation.*)

GODWIN

(*looking at her with a sage gentleness*)

You were speaking of . . . Fanny? (*She nods, mutely. His voice is gentle with a newness of careful tenderness.*) She told me you were here, as I came by.

MARY

Fanny!

GODWIN

Fanny, in her own speech; like a small rainbow messenger, to point the way. She pointed *up.* — And when I followed, what should I find indeed but You, enthroned? (*She backs away, gently, evidently almost dismayed at his enveloping gentleness. He makes a step after her; then on a second thought, steps back and stands still. He speaks with sudden adoring passion.*) Oh, stand

there so, again, for a moment; — for me! . . . (*Smiling, she obeys his gesture: and steps up on the model-stand, trying to be gay, but deeply moved.*) Why do your eyes drop from mine, now?

MARY

There is some change in your aspect surely, neighbor Godwin.

GODWIN

Mary!

MARY

(*tremulously*)

And there must be a change in mine as well . . . if you see me as one 'enthroned' . . . How different . . . how different —

GODWIN

Different . . . ?

MARY

From . . . what *he* was.

GODWIN

You are the source and centre of all the changes.

How did I ever see you otherwise? The blind worm that I have been! Opie is right. — We would-be philosophers who put to death our eyes and understanding —

MARY
(*laughing*)

Hear him!

GODWIN

Mary, it is true, that I was struggling with doubts . . . not doubts merely; Fear; Fear: think of it! Fear lest the gods might shake my life — long gray serenity — with a more god-like agitation. — Mary, *I feared* the whirlwinds that have gone over you, wonder of wonders, and left you still unbowed! I went away . . . to be rid of my fear; to know myself; to see you as you are. — And I see you as you are; now. — Never before: never before. And I know I am not, as I tried to think, blinded by your human sweetness. (*She covers her face with her hands.*) No, let me tell you; let me tell myself. As the days passed, the surer I grew, from longing. — And I came to-day, only to see the beginning of your portrait. And here at the gate,

— your own child calls to me: she bids me go higher. And up I climb, to reach you: and the door is open. And then, of a sudden, for a hill-top look, I see you as you are!

(*He holds his arms wide.* MARY, *on the edge of the model-stand, clasping her hands together, looks back at him, luminously.* — *Reënter* OPIE, *and halts with sudden unusual tact.*)

OPIE

I have it. They are all of them right. It shall be finished now. — I have the look.

(MARY *hastens down from the model-stand.* OPIE *is about to give her her hat again, when* MRS. INCHBALD *reënters exuberantly. She sweeps in the loiterers with a glance.*)

MRS. INCHBALD

Ah, there it is, precisely where I left it, — my fan! (*Going up to her earlier seat, she takes the fan.*) Did you know, dear Mrs. Imlay, some one is waiting to take you home? Young Mr. Southey, yes. And John wants a word with you now, Godwin, — about the play. Oh, yes, he was

after coming back for my fan, of course; but we could n't risk his young, young mind! I knew the two philosophers would be hurling their scorn —

GODWIN

Scorn? On such an afternoon?

MRS. INCHBALD

On all the commonplaces of this world.

OPIE

As for instance?

MRS. INCHBALD

Why, you Cornish wonder, what is the most commonplace thing in all this world? . . . What indeed, — but Marriage, Marriage, Marriage!

(*She nods debonairly to* MARY *and* OPIE, *takes* GODWIN's *arm and leads him away.*)

CURTAIN

Act II

29, *The Polygon, Somers Town, on a sunny summer day*

Scene: a living-room with a wide casement-window at back, centre. The doors, upper left and down right, stand open, that to the right leading to a corridor. Down, left, a double doorway, closed. The windows stand open, all. A cluster of chairs huddles together, waiting to be bestowed. A large table towards the centre holds numerous unrelated objects, including a tea-set in evident disorder, some books and a large hour-glass. One or two packing-cases cumber the floor at its foot. Down, right centre, a long Empire sofa.

Uppie, *an austere but dignified housekeeper in the forties, stands looking out of the window, with a silver tea-pot in one hand, and a polishing-cloth in the other. She thrusts out her head anon, and shakes the cloth, then speaks, with kindness softening her authoritative voice.*

UPPIE

(to one in the garden below)

No, no, . . . Dinna pat him. The dog is not our dog; he may bite thee. . . . Dinna pat him. Flowers is best. That's so, now. . . . Pick some for Uppie. — (*Withdrawing her head and reciting sonorously.*) . . . '*Gilead is mine and Mánasses is mine; over Edom . . . have I cast out my shoe.*' . . . '*Why hop ye so, ye high hills?*' . . .

(*Resumes her polishing. Enter, right, with wide eyes,* OPIE'S *boy,* TOM, *doubtfully.*)

TOM

Number 29? . . . Is this Number 29?

UPPIE

Of course it is.

TOM

How be I to know?

UPPIE

The number's on the door.

TOM

The door were open wide. — I'll fetch it.

UPPIE

What'll you fetch? — Leave that door where it is: and leave it open. — There's other things to come. (*Exit* TOM. UPPIE *goes to the window and looks out with softened mien. She calls.*) Take care: thou'll hurt thy little hands in the gateway there . . . Mind . . .

(*Reënter* TOM, *with a swathed picture in his arms*)

UPPIE

What's that?

TOM

It's for Mr. Godwin. That's what Mr. Opie said.

(*He takes off the covering, and leans the picture against the table. It is* OPIE'S *portrait of* MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, *finished and framed.*)

UPPIE

That's her . . . that's her!

TOM

When did Mr. Godwin come to here? I've seen that chair o' his in the old lodgings.

UPPIE

Go on, Boy. I'm busy. I must be upstairs and down to set the place to rights.

(*Turns the picture to the wall, left, carefully.*)

TOM

(*drawing in his head from the window*)

Here comes a lady; she's puzzled, too.

(*Enter* MRS. INCHBALD, *who pauses as she sees the two*)

MRS. INCHBALD.

This is Number 29? . . . Am I right?

UPPIE

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. INCHBALD

Mr. Godwin l-l-lives here?

UPPIE

(*with reserve*)

No,—yes, ma'am. In a manner. He is moving in.

MRS. INCHBALD

Moving in?—And *he* is out, then? So. I'm an early guest. He'll not be back soon? . . .There

is no chop waiting in the Dutch oven? . . . But where *is* the Dutch oven? — You here, Peter? — Have you got a new master?

TOM

Came on an errand from Mr. Opie, ma'am.

MRS. INCHBALD

Oh, to be sure! — 'T was Mr. Opie who told me of Godwin's new lodgings. I thought to surprise him with a greeting. I can't wait. . . . Make yourself useful, Peter, while the ph-ph-philosopher is out. (*To* UPPIE.) I suppose you don't know — (*Inspecting her dubiously.*) Heigh-ho, no matter! Will you give me a pen? I'll leave a note for him. — (*Laughing.*) Poor dear soul! New tea-cups . . . I don't remember those. . . . It's a luxury! . . . Two chairs; unfamiliar. *Green* tea . . . (*uncovering a caddy, and sniffing at it, to* UPPIE'S *indignation*). Green tea . . . (*bewildered*). An hour-glass. I've seen that. (*To* UPPIE.) You expect him soon?

(*Exit* TOM, *unwillingly, backing out.*)

UPPIE

(*coldly*)

I can't say, ma'am. He left no word with *me.*

MRS. INCHBALD

Ah, well! 'T is useless to dally longer. . . . Pray, desire my compliments to Mr. Godwin when he comes back; and tell him that Mrs. Inchbald dropped in for a moment, to remind him of the play this evening. Oh, to be sure, I'll tell him, myself.

(*Takes the pen from the table indicated by* UPPIE *and sits down to scribble a note, with absorption.*)

UPPIE

(*to herself sonorously, while she stands, inspecting* MRS. INCHBALD'S *back*)

. . . '*He hath said in his heart, Tush, I shall never be cast down: there shall no harm happen unto me. . . . He lieth waiting secretly; even as a lion lurketh he in his den. — He doth ravish the poor: when he getteth him into his net.*' . . .

MRS. INCHBALD

(*rising*)

There! Mrs. Inchbald. — And tell him, Mrs. Inchbald says, he ought to have a mirror *there.*

(*Pointing to the wall, right.*)

UPPIE

Mrs. Inchbald. — If you please, ma'am, I think Mr. Godwin sent a letter to a lady of that name, this morning before he went out.

MRS. INCHBALD

A note to me? How vexing! Waiting now at my lodgings, I suppose. — And then, — but you could n't know . . . Ah! (*Darts across the room at a pile of books set down, haphazard.*) 'A Simple Story'! (*Smiling benignly. Turning; she backs against a child's high-chair and gazes at it open-mouthed.*) What — in the name of pitiful Providence — is — that? Has — is — I never saw — *that* before. Tell me! — Has Mr. Godwin . . . *adopted* . . . s-s-some one?

UPPIE

(*with reserve*)

In a manner, I suppose you might say, ma'am.

(*They look at each other,* MRS. INCHBALD *baffled by* UPPIE'S *taciturnity;* UPPIE *triumphant with reserve.*)

MRS. INCHBALD

(*agitated*)

And — wh-wh-wh-why did n't he ask m-me?

UPPIE
(*puzzled, but hostile*)

Ask you, ma'am? . . .

MRS. INCHBALD

I don't understand it . . . (*Reconsidering.*) I shall, doubtless, when I have my l-letter. (UPPIE *serenely removes the little chair from the foreground and sets it aside.* MRS. INCHBALD, *shaken for a moment, removes the nosegay from her bosom, and looks about for a vase; finding a bowl on the table, she puts the flowers in it.*) Poor, lonely creature! . . . I suppose (*to* UPPIE) he will educate it . . . according to his system. But you would n't know! . . . At any rate, it won't be able to answer back for a long time yet! Will it? (*Giving way to curiosity.*)

UPPIE

I should think not, madam.

MRS. INCHBALD
(*at a plunge*)

How old . . . is the c-creature?

UPPIE
(*frigidly*)

Three years, ma'am.

MRS. INCHBALD

And you take care of it? . . . Oh, it's *yours!* I see! — Oh, how absurd of me! I beg your pardon, really. (*Sits down suddenly, with relief; while* UPPIE *listens impassively to her laughter.*) How very nice. He must be dying of s-solitude. Wh-what a change.

(*In the doorway, appears* SYMES, *who stands inquiringly.* MRS. INCHBALD *rises; and stands still as she recognizes him. Her laughter dies.*)

SYMES

I beg your pardon. — Is this Number 29?

MRS. INCHBALD
(*advancing*)

Yes, it's 29. I was asking only now. But there's no one at home. Surely this is . . . Mr. S-S-Symes!

SYMES
(*bowing*)

Mrs. Inchbald.

MRS. INCHBALD

I remember you thoroughly. At Mr. Opie's we met you. Only last season. Mr. Opie's painting-room.

SYMES

You are more than kind, madam.

MRS. INCHBALD

Oh, I could n't forget that name. You'll pardon me, won't you, if I have to run away at once?

(*They bow. Exit* MRS. INCHBALD.)

SYMES

(*to* UPPIE)

I beg your pardon for walking in. Perhaps you don't know that the door is wide open. I intended to pay my respects to Mrs. Imlay; and I went to the address — quite near — which she once gave me. They told me that she had removed from her lodgings there to Number 29. (UPPIE *melts.*) Is she — could I see her?

UPPIE

She's out at present, Sir; but I 'm looking for her at any moment. They went out for a walk . . .

It's most unusual, Sir . . . You'll pardon the disorder. We've only been here a short time in this house; and I could n't set it all to rights at once.

SYMES

I feel that I'm intruding; I must n't do that. But she was so good as to bid me come . . . some day. Perhaps this is not the day.

UPPIE

(*calling out of the window*)

Now don't 'ee call to any strange cat, my dearie. Flowers is best. Be a good child now. — I beg pardon, Sir?

SYMES

I thought I saw behind the hedge . . . a little girl? Mrs. Imlay's little girl? — As I came by? Do you — do you think I might go down and speak with her awhile, — till Mrs. Imlay returns?

UPPIE

(*beamingly*)

Certainly, Sir! (*Calls out of the window.*) Here

is a gentleman coming to talk to 'ee. Get up off the grass, darling. There's a daisy under the laburnum tree . . . You show it to him. He's never seen the like. (*To* SYMES.) The best way, Sir, is through the door at the back of the corridor downstairs. (*Showing him out, left upper door.*) There's the market-boy. (*Exit after him.*)

(*Enter, right, laughing,* AMELIA ALDERSON *and* JOHN OPIE)

AMELIA

She certainly wrote me, *Twenty-nine, The Polygon, Somers Town; after April 10th.*

OPIE

He said the same thing, precisely.

AMELIA

And straightway I come to see her in her new lodgings; and must needs encounter you; coming to quite the same place; coming to see quite a different person.

OPIE

No. Coming to see quite the same person I always come to see. Whenever I go out, it 's

always you I go to see; and wherever I go; since ever we met. A monotonous programme for you, till we both die. Or till —

AMELIA

Or till I beg you begone; — and keep myself to that mind.

OPIE

But since we are met —

AMELIA

Agree with me, this time! It's certain that he loves her.

OPIE

Yes, I believe it. I used to think him the one man in the world who was made of pure Reason; no passion in him.

AMELIA

She has transformed him. And she herself — how happy she looks! I hardly dare to breathe upon them. — I believe it will all come true forever!

OPIE

I sent Tom before me, with the portrait. —

There it is. (*He goes to it and turns it face outwards. They stand before it.*) No, it has n't the hill-top look. — After all, would it be true to paint that, if one could? It can't happen every day. (*Enter together buoyantly from the corridor* GODWIN *and* MARY. *Her arms are full of flowers; she is laughing.*) A surprise for us!

MARY

Oh, the happy chance. — You here, together!

AMELIA

And you?

MARY

We, here together!

GODWIN

You see? — And, for once, before our working-hours are over.

(*He searches their faces happily.* MARY *puts her hand on his arm.*)

AMELIA

(*expectantly*)

Then you — new neighbors —

MARY

We 'neighbors' —

OPIE

At last —

AMELIA

It is — I mean — you are going to be — You *are* —

MARY

We are.

AMELIA

Married!

GODWIN

Married, in brief!

MARY

Long ago.

OPIE

Married!

GODWIN

Magical word. (OPIE *shakes his hands joyfully.*)

AMELIA

(*rapturously*)

I saw it, from the first. . . . I don't know why I — I'm so astonished. . . . But after all you — he had written . . . though I knew he could n't believe it . . . and after all. . . . *When* were you married? And why did n't you tell your Amelia?

MARY

Ah, just the being married; you know what we think of the old-world's thought of that! What does that matter? And as for the true surprise — which we've had to ourselves this long time, were we not going to tell you in just another day, — just another! — Were we not going to tell you, just — Now?

GODWIN

I've written to our oldest friends these past few days; friends at a distance. . . . I wrote to Mrs. Inchbald only this morning.

AMELIA

And what about me?

MARY

I waited to tell you, dearest. I knew you were

coming. (*She sees the portrait.*) And here is my defender! (*Curtsies delightedly to the portrait.*) Do the honors now, Mary. — Say your thanks for the two of us. Say your thanks to Mr. Opie, for his faith . . . and gentleness. They'll never dare to call you Hyena any more, when once they see this; no, no!

AMELIA

Oh, Loveliest, what bliss to see you, in your home! . . . Go away, you learned gentlemen, and see that the house is right. I have such foolish things to say to her, for just this moment.

MARY

Show him the other rooms, William. — Ask his opinion; just for the sake of asking. And then — come back! (*The two men laughingly exeunt, by the upper left door.* AMELIA *and* MARY *kiss each other.*) And it is such news to you? I thought you saw.

AMELIA

But — you two to marry!

MARY

That delights you, does it?

AMELIA

What you can do for the world, now!

MARY

Yes, marriage is for sake of others; so it seems. And so it seemed to us. But I am happy!

AMELIA

Happy? And Godwin is new-born! Only think; once upon a time, just before I met you, people said, — some people said, — that the Philosopher's eye was upon me; — *me*, and my harp; and my very neat slippers. Think of it! — And as surely as I come from Norwich, I've never set eyes on *this* William Godwin, never; I nor my harp, nor my very, very neat slippers.

MARY

Ah, you know whom you have to make happy. — Do so, dear! You can spend *all* your years together.

AMELIA

(*hovering over the table*)

Yes, that's so certain; it's the only hindrance. No suspense! . . . New tea-cups? But of course. Here's an old remnant. —

MARY

Cherish it! Many a time in those old days when I was so poor and shabby, I've offered my guests not only tea, but wine in those same tea-cups. And the very ones who marvelled at my shabbiness, were still glad to come and drink my tea, — and wine; — and welcome!

AMELIA

And now, some one is here to care for you, as you have cared for others. Some one is here to strip the briars off your every rose!

MARY

Ah . . . how I did long to do that, for women. Perhaps now —

AMELIA

You will do all that you have dreamed.

MARY

You are good to think that. Once, of course, people would say to me, 'When you have a home of your own, then you'll think no more of these wild projects for reforming the world.' — Reforming the world, Amelia! — Simply to desire

truth to be true; love to be love; thought to be thought; — for the poor; — for women and for men. Simply to desire the human to be human! — And while that passion burned in me, my own blood-kindred, — my mother, my brothers and sisters, — yes, and our father, too, our wretched abject father, — God forgive him, — were crying out to the hearing of my body, — for . . . husks. (*Puts her hands over her ears.*)

(*Reënter* UPPIE)

UPPIE

If you please, Mrs. Godwin, there's a gentleman to see you. He's in the garden, playing with Miss Fanny, ma'am. Shall I desire him up? His name is Symes; Mr. Symes.

MARY

Oh, yes, yes, yes! . . . I remember. And this is his first call. — Bring him in, most kindly, Uppie, please. — Stay here, Amelia. Help me to make him happy . . . about it. (*Exit* UPPIE.) . . . You are right. I must not think of those old days; nor of anything but Now. Godwin is transformed; and I am so happy. — You should see him with my Fanny. That was the first new

light upon him, that tenderness. He is a treasury of virtues that he does n't know. And if . . . if she ever has a brother —. Oh, some day, she must — (*laughing*) she *shall* have a brother! —

AMELIA

Yes, dear, I can imagine.

MARY

Do! —

(*Interrupts herself with a sharp gesture, at a sudden sound of street music. — A violin, with a harp, plays a strain of 'Drink to me only with thine eyes.'*)

AMELIA

(*with pleasure*)

'*Drink to me only*'! (*Runs to the window.*)

MARY

We have more singers in the street here. — Oh, William! — William has stopped him. (*The music stops.*) — And I've heard him before. His voice is sweet, truly. (*Looking out of the window, as* AMELIA *turns back.*) And he's blind. Did you see that? He's blind. . . . Gone away. —

(*Enter* SYMES, *up left. He looks at once towards* MARY, *and stands silent, smiling. She comes towards him, with outstretched hand.*)

MARY

This is a pleasure, Mr. Symes! You were good to remember my invitation. How long ago it seems! Did it take you so long to screw up your courage, and come?

SYMES

(*whose manner is larger and more dignified than it was, but still simple and direct*)

Yes. — Miss Alderson. (*Bowing.*)

AMELIA

And how comes it, you know this new dwelling as soon as I?

SYMES

I went to the address near by which your Champion had given me that afternoon at Mr. Opie's; and I was told that she no longer lived there. And even as I considered the way, a messenger appeared . . . a heavenly visitant in dis-

guise; with — what think you, ladies? — in his very hands? — The Portrait. (*Points it out.*)

MARY

(*bowing to herself gaily*)

Well done, again!

SYMES

I followed. — I even walked in. The door was open.

AMELIA

(*animatedly*)

What then! the portrait led you directly to the new home of Mrs. William Godwin? What a fairy-tale! (SYMES *is visibly startled.*)

SYMES

I — I beg your pardon?

AMELIA

Did n't you know? You had n't heard? Why, no, of course.

SYMES

Mrs. . . . Godwin?

(*He looks at* MARY, *who regards him with friendly benignity.*)

AMELIA

(*in impulsive distress*)

He does n't know! (*Hastily*) How stupid of me! Of course you could n't know. *I* did n't know; — not really *know*, you know, until a little while ago. — How silly of me! Really, I —

MARY

Very well announced, Amelia, I think. —

AMELIA

Will you excuse me? I'm coming back. — I left — I left — something or other — downstairs. (*To* MARY) Where are they? Oh. — For a moment! (*Exit.*)

SYMES

(*who has recovered himself, and speaks with the calm and friendliness of an older man*)

Will you pardon me?

MARY

Pardon?

SYMES

This ignorant intrusion. — I had not even heard of your . . . removal to a new home.

MARY

Please think no more of it. Indeed, indeed, I should so like to tell you. — You must be puzzled. You had heard certain opinions of mine: — and much distorted; as they have always been. Then, too, you had heard something of my personal history; for that I told you myself. And now; if you are wonder-struck that I seem to have thrown away the beliefs that I . . . that I have suffered for, — how should I blame you? Pray, stay awhile.

SYMES

You are willing?

MARY

I desire it; with all my heart. (*They sit.*) I saw that day at Mr. Opie's — I could not help seeing — that the facts of my story pained you; when I insisted upon them. I never willingly concealed them, you know. But only to truth-loving minds would I ever explain. I believe that you are one. I look upon you as a friend. A friend: almost as the Americans call our Quakers, — Friend.

SYMES

That would be to me an order of knighthood (*smiling*) in my obscurity.

MARY

Then let us be friends; and understand what we can, as we live on. — I begin to see that all my ideas of human life were gloomy and foreboding. From my childhood they were dark, save for one hope; my hope (*smiling*) that I should find some path out, when I grew older; that I should be a slayer of dragons; the dragons that I knew! Only the brutal look of marriage — as it is on this Island — had I ever seen closely. My own mother's life was one long blasphemy of womanhood. And my sister married — to escape from Home! — How could it all do anything but warp my wits? Until all the poor helpless parasites I saw, with no livelihood, no work, no life, they thought, unless they Married! — How could they seem different in any wise from the world's accursed, who have always sold their minds and bodies? How could they, . . . Friend?

SYMES

I see.

MARY

I was fevered, perhaps, — with knowledge of this home-life that was ours. I was beside myself with hardships that were not mine to tell of. All my hopes of fellowship were beyond my youth; they were with the men and women, — the few men and women who see; the few who were eager, as I am eager, to help solve the dark tyrannies of the world. — Light and liberty for all: — the hope of the New World; the dream of France; the dream of all human nature that is really human! — And disgust with the false, had taken away the God from men: most men. But not from me! Those of us who kept our God, knew that whatever He is, He knows the heart of men! And who else was there to serve? So: when I went to France, and met there . . . a man — from the new world of America — (*she speaks slowly but serenely, from a new knowledge of happiness*) and the Terror threw us together, with the clinging of creatures on a lone island in a sea of horror; — there was no State; there was no Church; there was *nothing left;* but the human heart, and the faith still burning! A proud faith, in a New World, for all to build; men, and women. — And as to marriage; There were

a hundred paltry complications; dangers that name and nation made, among a maddened people. — What did that matter to me? — God knew my heart. . . . I thought that I knew . . . his. I thought it a folly . . . and a wrong, then, to vow anything. But I believed . . . that Love must live forever.

SYMES

Perhaps it does.

MARY

But I . . . died. — No matter. You know the ending of that story. It left me with a bitter wisdom.

SYMES

All bitter?

MARY

No. . . . No. My little girl . . . my revelation. And now — Mr. Godwin . . . whose philosophy may seem to you cold.

SYMES

But I shall always be an obscure person!

MARY

(*looking at him wistfully, like a child at bay*)
He is so tender . . . with her. — I was deceived in him when we first met, I think. And he — (*laughing*) he saw that I talk too much!

SYMES

(*cheerfully*)

And you are married. . . .

MARY

Married: yes. — But it is only now that we've made it known. . . . Oh, yes, it took much thought; the *words* for it all so seldom say what one means. That is hard, friend, for those who would rebuild the world, — and who desire to say only what they mean: no syllable untrue. But if only I can still fight for the Cause, in this same bewildering, war-stained world; and among these people who go on living still as if no struggle had ever been. — Even the Americans seem to have forgotten.

SYMES

You will live for it — write for it —

MARY

And you will come now, often?

SYMES

You are too kind. I — I have to return to the country very shortly . . . But perhaps I . . . later . . . in the Autumn.

MARY

Oh, we are not such birds of passage. We shall be here. Be sure you come in the Autumn.

SYMES

Had I but known, I would have brought some good omen with me. (*He looks at her intently.*)

MARY

(*wistfully*)

I hope I have not . . . hurt your belief in me.

SYMES

How so?

MARY

My . . . my inconsistency. I sometimes think we are like rose-vines. We need a sustaining

trellis of admiration, to grow on. . . . Since that brief boldness, when I pushed away all my . . . trellis, — I've been — at times — dismayed.

SYMES

You put in my mind a childlike thought — of God: — as Love that lasts forever. . . .

(*He kisses her hand, serenely, and goes out, right.* GODWIN, AMELIA *and* OPIE *re-enter, left.*)

AMELIA

Well, has he really gone? The poor too-late man?

MARY

(*turning*)

Do you know, he said something just now. About God, it was. He called God . . . Love that lasts forever. . . . (OPIE *looks at* AMELIA.)

GODWIN

That is a figure of speech, my dearest. . . . Attractive, certainly.

MARY

(*laughing, on second thought*)

Oh, William, William Godwin! — And while I

think of it, *Dearest!* How could you stop our singer in the street? Never, never again!

GODWIN

You like him, love? I had n't heard a thing. I thought you would n't wish it.

MARY

He's one of the charms of this neighborhood: does n't he pass your study? (GODWIN *shakes his head.*) And the violin is always nicely in tune; and he's apt to sing '*Drink to me only*' . . . And if you'd only waited, his voice is very sweet. And above all things, Darling, — he is blind. —

GODWIN

Not a better musician for that, my dear, strictly speaking. (*With sudden compunction.*) Blind? — So is Love; the old wives say. And so was I. Forgive me.

(MARY *leaves him to devote herself to* OPIE. *They stand together, considering the portrait, for a moment. Then she moves with* OPIE *slowly about the room, stopping to consult him about the placing of various objects.* AMELIA *points majestically to the hour-glass on the table.*)

AMELIA

What is *that?*

GODWIN

An hour-glass, Miss Alderson.

AMELIA

Of course I know an hour-glass when I see one. But what is it doing here? That dour reminder, like a skeleton at the feast. This is no place for measuring hours of time, you incorrigible sage. It should go back to your study. — Unless you move your study home, — here?

GODWIN

It is a trivial detail, perhaps. But it belongs to a habit I have, of exactitude and curiosity. Most of my day has been spent and always will be spent, doubtless, in my Study. But now and again, I like to know how much time I've given to desultory reading, or, perhaps, to letter-writing: without watching the time too closely. As to my Study, I still keep my rooms at Evesham. It is not far off, you see; and I — we — have always been of the opinion that the fondest souls can, by perpetual association, dull their fondness for each other . . . this opinion, of

course, without experience. — But it would be too precious a risk. It is one of the minor reasons why Marriage is such a mistake. — *Has been* . . . such a mistake (*looking across at* MARY) . . . or, let me say, has . . . often been such a . . . grievous mistake. *We* shall never risk dulling the northern lights of ever-fresh admiration with that indifference. What we possess without intermission, we inevitably hold light. Separation is the image of death; but it is Death stripped of all that is most tremendous, and his dart purged of its deadly venom. I always thought St. Paul's rule, that we should die daily, an exquisite maxim. (*Serenely.*) The practice of it would give to life a double relish. — Thus in my own Study, a few streets away, if I am seized with a sudden desire to know what Mary is doing at that moment, — if I long to see her; if I picture her listless, biting her pen, gazing on space, — if I am tempted to throw aside my work like a schoolboy and run home to know if *she* is wondering if *I* am wondering what she is doing, — shall I yield to that temptation?

AMELIA

I hope so!

GODWIN

But no, dear Amelia. That is no way to help the world.

AMELIA

It might help Mary. — Think of her — her history.

GODWIN

(*amiably*)

No. — We are agreed together to submit our impulses to reflection. To act, after reflection, is a very different matter. The impulses crowd and throng. And what a subtle tribute to Mary, — to that exquisite enjoyment which she alone — I beg your pardon, Amelia, but you know it is true — which she alone knows how to draw from the smallest circumstance, — that my thoughts veer so often, to herward! Only to her, (*ardently*) though I do not follow them. This morning, I made an exception.

AMELIA

How many doors away?

GODWIN

Only some twenty.

AMELIA

Twenty doors! . . . A door is a dreadful thing. Two walls — *side*-walls — to a house. That makes forty side-walls, does n't it? . . . Forty walls! And for a human soul to search Love through all the world . . . and then . . . find it! —And then build forty walls!

GODWIN

We did not build them, Amelia.

AMELIA

(*severely*)

And what if you died? That thing (*pointing to the hour-glass*) reminds me.

(*Turns it upside-down, then re-turns it; then takes it away and sets it on the dresser.*)

GODWIN

(*serenely*)

I *shall* die, some day. And that will end it all; all our impulses and our disciplines. But this is Now.

AMELIA

May Mary brighten your creed, friend Godwin.

This is not bridal talk; nor thinking. You are always so much gentler than your beliefs. In fact you never practise what you preach. Heaven help your poor disciples!

GODWIN

There you touch me to the quick. Will my friends take me for a renegade?

AMELIA

You?

GODWIN

That we — who have taught and spoken against this hypocritic tyranny of Marriage — should be married?

AMELIA

Mary never taught anything against marriage . . . (*thoughtfully.*) But you . . . well, can't you change your mind? What *is* a philosopher? Is he a barnacle? (*indignantly.*) . . . Wait a moment! (*Runs to the book-case.*) . . . Oh, I know where to find you. I often asked myself, could it be true? . . . (*She extracts a book, and waves it towards* OPIE *and* MARY *who come down smil-*

ingly. She finds the place, and declaims, running her finger from place to place. OPIE, *too, plucks a book out.*) Here! 'Political Justice' . . . Page . . . ah, here it is. — 'The institution of marriage is a system of fraud!' . . . (*They all laugh at* GODWIN'S *smiling abashment.*) 'We ought to dismiss our mistake as soon as it is detected . . . but we are taught to cherish it.' . . . 'Marriage, as now understood, is a Monopoly, and the Worst of Monopolies.'

GODWIN }
MARY }
(*triumphantly*)

'*As now understood*'!

AMELIA

'The abolition of marriage, in the form now practised, will be attended with no evils.'

GODWIN
(*serenely*)

'In the form now practised.' There I have you. (*Enter* UPPIE *with a note, also a mail-bag.*) What is it, Uppie?

UPPIE

A boy with a letter, Sir. — And the mail-bag at the same time. The boy was sudden, Sir. Will there be an answer?

(MARY *takes the letter and gives it to* GODWIN *after a glance.*)

MARY

For you, dear . . . From Mrs. Inchbald.

UPPIE

That was the name, ma'am, . . . the lady who called here, earlier.

MARY

(*reassured*)

She came here? Oh, then all's well.

GODWIN

(*to* OPIE)

I sent her a note this morning, myself; announcing our marriage . . . (*To* MARY) Open it, my love.

MARY

Read it, you. I'm not afraid . . . not *very* much afraid.

(GODWIN, *with an effort, opens it and shows*

some vexation as he reads. MARY *takes it as he hands it to her; and reads it with blank dismay. Silence grows. She hands it to* AMELIA, *who reads, first with indignation.*)

AMELIA

How odd! . . . But then. How are we reading it? In the expectation of something witty and . . . and not too kind . . . After all . . . (*Reads, in a very cordial voice, hurrying over its ungracious doubleness.*) 'I most sincerely wish you and Mrs. Godwin joy. . . . But, assured that your joyfulness would obliterate from your memory every trifling engagement . . . Trifling engagement, I have entreated . . . I have entreated another person to supply your place; — and perform your office in securing a box. If I have done wrong, when you next marry, I will act differently.' . . .

(*Thrusts it into* OPIE'S *hand and sits on end of sofa, wiping her eyes under her drooping hat.*)

OPIE

(*shaking his head*)

Miss Alderson, as an imitation of Mrs. Inch-

bald . . . you are seriously unsuccessful. (*Reads coldly after making a preliminary face.*) 'I most sincerely wish you and Mrs. Godwin joy. But, assured that your joyfulness would obliterate from your memory every trifling engagement, I have entreated another person to supply your place. . . . If I have done wrong, when you next marry, I will act differently.' . . .

(*They all look at* MARY, *who shakes her head, hopelessly . . . then they look at one another.*)

GODWIN

Give it not a thought, my love. She 's such an old friend.

MARY

Of yours.

GODWIN

She is grieved, plainly, that we . . . that we did not tell her sooner.

MARY

But — after that — of course I must not go.

UPPIE

I beg pardon, ma'am. The same lady left the

nosegay on the table. . . . I set it in water, at once.

(*She goes to the table, and skilfully abstracts the note under her apron. Exit* UPPIE *with boughs that* MARY *had brought in, covering all.*)

MARY

(*comforted*)

Oh, how nice of her! . . . Rather unusual, don't you think? From her to me?

OPIE

(*briefly*)

Yes, for Mrs. Inchbald. — We must go, now, and leave you to your mail-bag.

AMELIA

Yes, indeed. — You see, after all, 't was playful.

OPIE

Thoroughly playful. — That proves it.

(*Pointing to the nosegay.*)

MARY

Please stay, and share our tea!

AMELIA

Never, never! That is, not to-day. A little later, I shall come; just to see how a great literary light keeps her home. But never to-day. — Come, Mr. John Opie. Away with us!

(*They part affectionately in the doorway. Exeunt* AMELIA *and* OPIE. GODWIN *opens the mail-bag, sitting down on the long Empire sofa.* — MARY *perches on the arm of it and looks over his shoulder.*)

GODWIN

From my mother — God bless her! . . . To use a popular phrase. You can't help loving her when you meet. . . . 'Your broken resolution in regard to matrimony encourages me to hope that you will ere long embrace the Gospel, and not only you but your other half, whose souls should be both one, as Watts says, the sooner the better. . . . My dears, whatever you do, do not make invitations and entertainments. Live comfortable with one another. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her. I cannot give you better advice than out of Proverbs, the Prophets, and New Testament. My best affections attend you both. — From your Mother.' —

(MARY *delves after another letter and listens with growing cheer, as he reads it, pointedly, to her.*)

MARY

From Mr. Holcroft . . .

GODWIN

'From my very heart and soul I give you joy.' (*Holds it under her eyes.*) Those words; do you see, unbeliever? 'I think you the most extraordinary married pair in existence. . . . I hope and expect to see you — both — and very soon. If you show coldness or refuse me, you will do injustice to a heart which, since it has really known you, never for a moment felt cold to you.' . . .

MARY
(*reading*)

'I cannot be mistaken concerning the woman you have married' . . . Did you leave out my name? — 'It is Mrs. W.' . . . (*She looks at him, troubled.*) 'Your secrecy a little pains me. . . . It tells me you do not yet know me. — Pray inform me, sweet lady, in what state is your novel?

And on what, courteous sir, are you employed? . . . Holcroft!' (*She delves after another letter.*) Your own familiar, Mr. Tuthill. — (GODWIN *hesitates.*) Come, read it. Let us take the worst. He agreed with you about marriage, once . . .

GODWIN
(*reading dispassionately*)

'I feel very much gratified at finding myself numbered with those who had engaged Mrs. Godwin's particular esteem and should rejoice to pay honest tribute. But if there be men who appear to me to violate those principles which they profess they hold sacred, I cannot imitate them.' . . . The rest is mere argument, my love.

MARY
(*dazedly*)

I suppose . . . the world cannot turn new in a day. . . . (*She feels her way, up, brokenly towards the doorway. She strives for speech an instant.*) Uppie, Uppie! (UPPIE *appears.*) . . . Fanny's supper-time. . . . She shall have strawberries too; because it is a festival . . . And bring some honey. — I'll set her table, here. (*Exit* UPPIE. MARY *looks out of the window and waves her hand*

tenderly to FANNY, *below, while* GODWIN *sits looking before him. She turns back more cheerfully, gathering animation as she sets forth the high-chair, and clears away from the table towards the centre, various superfluous objects.*) Fanny's state-supper; with two parents to wait upon her. Come!

(*She inspects a silver mug critically, and places it, with a porringer.* — GODWIN *rises, and smilingly examines the silver on the dresser.*)

GODWIN

What a child you are! Who'd dream it?

MARY

And you, friend Godwin, that you dance attendance here, with knife and fork and spoon! — Oh, let's make-believe that Fanny is yours; all yours; all yours. No; that is not what I mean. She's all mine. She is just a little, stray child of God . . . for us to make divinely happy.

GODWIN

A figure of speech, my dear. —

MARY

Let's be Roman, then, and pray to our Lares before each meal. And Fanny shall descend upon us, and eat benignly of your gifts and offerings. (*He kisses her outstretched hand. . . . She breaks out:*) Oh, kiss my hand again; just my hand. I don't know why; but I think it soothes my hurted feelings. (*With feverish gaiety.*) It's good for broken wings. Nothing else is good for broken wings. Only constant deference . . . and kisses on her hands. — (*Looking about her.*) The household gods! . . . Ah, don't we understand now? The reason why the poor people in this poor world will cheapen and dull their domesticity? They don't bid in the gods! . . . They stuff them away in churches for once-a-week. But we know better! We'll work; and fast: and pray the gods to come, and sit at meat with us. — And I shall be a Champion again. — (*Runs to the window and calls out.*) Come up, now, darling, come! — (*Comes away from the window; and looks poignantly at* GODWIN, *who is sitting down, right, looking at his handful of letters.*) William . . . (*Her voice is tremulous. He looks at her instantly. As she stands still, searching his face with keen wistful-*

ness, he rises, as if to cross to her. She puts out her hand against his impulse.) No. — Not yet. . . . Let me look at you a moment. '*After due reflection.*'

(*Unsmilingly for a long pause, almost of awe, they look at each other with faces that reflect thought, humor, deepest query. Then* GODWIN, *smiling, holds his arms wide, without stirring:* MARY, *with a sudden outburst of childlike feeling, runs across the room into them.*)

CURTAIN

Act III

Autumn.

The same room, somewhat altered in appearance. The casement windows are closed. There is no portrait there, and no table towards the centre. The long sofa stands left, down, slanted towards the wall: and before it, a covered cradle. Up by the window sits Uppie, *reading through her spectacles. — She holds a Bible open before her and moves her finger along, conscientiously, prompting her memory in a sonorous chanting voice; trying the hard words with some difficulty, but final satisfaction.*

Uppie

'My soul also is sore troubled: . . . but . . . how long wilt thou punish me?'. . . Five. 'For in death no man remembereth thee: and who will give thee thanks in the pit?' Six. 'I am weary of my groaning: every night wash I my bed: and water my couch with my tears.' Seven. — 'My beauty is gone for very trouble; and worn away because of mine enemies.' (*Wipes her eye-glasses, and slowly turns a few pages.*) 'The tabernacles

of the Edomites, and the Ishmaelites: the . . . Moab-ites . . . and the . . . Hagar-enes . . . Hagarenes.'

(*A sound of men's voices. She lifts her head; places her eye-glasses in the book and rises. The double-door to the left opens and* DR. FORDYCE *and* MR. CARLISLE *enter quietly, followed by* WILLIAM GODWIN, *pale and tense. They close the door.* GODWIN *looks fixedly at their faces.* FORDYCE *turns, and pats his arm almost tenderly.*)

FORDYCE

Give yourself an hour of ease, Mr. Godwin. It is a most encouraging appearance. And . . . I may add this quite truthfully, encouraging for the first time.

CARLISLE

Not one woman in a thousand — ten thousand, — could have rallied so, I believe; after (*with a glance at* FORDYCE) — after these three days. . . . Compose yourself. You owe it to her.

GODWIN

(*after a pause*)

Gentlemen, on your word of honor; dare I leave

her . . . for an hour? Don't torture me with false hope. . . . I have been schooling myself to meet . . . the worst; — as far as . . . the mind can gather its forces together. Do not encourage me to hope.

CARLISLE

Mr. Godwin, I feel with Mr. Fordyce here, and with you, that it would be the height of cruelty to delude you. You know, for yourself, what a struggle we have seen, with forces beyond us all. But she is sustained, miraculously, one might be tempted to say. The babe (*glancing towards the cradle*), as we have seen, is now in a highly satisfying condition.

FORDYCE

Oh, quite satisfactory.

CARLISLE

There has been no chill for two days. . . .

GODWIN

(*brightening feverishly*)

Yes, yes, that is true. That I had forgotten.

(*A knock at the door, right.* UPPIE *goes to*

open it. The three men stand as if charmed, waiting. Enter TOM *with an armful of flowers and a note.* — GODWIN *rouses himself to take them.*)

TOM

From Mr. Opie, Sir. — Desires his compliments . . . and begs to know how . . . how is your Lady since yesterday, Sir.

GODWIN

Thank you, Tom, thank you. . . . Better, we think; — we almost dare to think. I . . . I will take him that answer myself. . . . A breath of air. Yes, I will go out for a little. Dr. Fordyce here, — and Mr. Carlisle, tell me I may do so; — I *should* do so. (*He looks at them closely again. They nod assent.*) Thank you, gentlemen. I will meet you below . . . in a moment.

(*They bow and go out*)

TOM

I was to stay, Sir, if there could be any use of me.

(GODWIN *looks vaguely at him; then refers to* OPIE'S *note, still in his hand, and nods his head slowly.*)

GODWIN

Uppie. . . . (UPPIE *draws nearer.*) Things are more hopeful, Uppie. — Mrs. Fenwick has gone to her own home for a few hours. Mr. Montague is still resting, downstairs, in the drawing-room. I have begged him to sleep awhile. If any one calls, that person must be spoken with at the door, or up here. But on no account wake Mr. Montague. He has watched with me three nights. Yes, Uppie; they say your mistress is recovering. Yes, yes.

UPPIE

The Lord be praised for that. — If it is indeed so . . . Sir.

GODWIN

(*more warmly*)

I am sure you share our . . . gratification . . . our anxious hope.

UPPIE

The Lord's will be done, Sir; if it comes to that.

GODWIN

(*uncertainly*)

Elizabeth, your good intentions are not to be

doubted. But in one respect, my confidence in you . . . is tempted to waver.

UPPIE

(*dismayed*)

Sir?

GODWIN

I feel a certain un-ease; lest you should feel yourself drawn to speak to Mary . . . to my wife . . . to your mistress. . . . In brief, lest you should make some opportunity of her weakness in this hour of emergency, to broach to her your own — er — religious convictions.

UPPIE

I, Sir? . . . Reproach her, Sir?

GODWIN

(*nervously*)

Broach, broach, — suggest — converse — heavens!

UPPIE

Talk to her, Sir? — About . . . dying, Sir?

GODWIN

(*distraught*)

Be quiet, woman! . . . I mean — It would be

very natural to *you*. — Remember the temptation you gave way to, in your natural distress. And remember — it is my Command — she is not, in my absence, to be disturbed with a word of Cant! — (*Moderating his indignation.*) I mean, with *anything* ordinarily to be stigmatized — I would say *characterized* as 'Religious.'

UPPIE

No Cant from me, Sir! — And if she do be better —

GODWIN

(*severely*)

There is no need at any time. Your mistress's . . . religion . . . is a matter of her daily life and character; in all her days. . . . It has nothing to do with super — with fear or weakness. She is stronger than all of us. — Do you follow me, Uppie?

UPPIE

No, Sir. — But when your lady is well again, Sir, *she'll* explain it to me.

GODWIN

(*going, and turning back*)

And here is Tom, Mr. Opie's boy. (TOM, *who*

has just seen the cradle is staring at it open-mouthed.) You know him. . . . Let him lend a hand, till I return. — Yes, Tom, we are doing very well. — I was going to see Opie myself; was I not? That was it. — God bless you, Tom. — To use a vulgar expression. —

(*Reënter, right,* MR. CARLISLE. *He sees* GODWIN'S *shattered state of mind, and takes him by the arm, gently.*)

CARLISLE

Come, Mr. Godwin. A walk will do you worlds of good. I'll meet you below. (*Puts him out of the door, right, and turns back to* UPPIE.) Remember; it is best that you all take what rest you can, after this strain. Our patient is worried, to-day, over the care you are taking. Don't let her know of the body-guard in the house. . . . Above all, boy, don't wake the baby! (*Exit.*)

UPPIE

(*to* TOM, *tartly*)

Did you never see a cradle before, Boy?

TOM

Not since I'm living with Mr. Opie. . . . Us had un at home; always. . . . So that's what it is.

UPPIE

What It is! . . . And a beautiful dove, too. A perfect young Lady. More than one week old. Not like her mother, as I can see. Fair hair and blue eyes. . . . But we never can know what we will be.

(*Vaguely cerebrating after* OPHELIA. *Motions for silence suddenly, listening towards the bedroom door.*)

MARY'S *voice*
(*within*)

Uppie . . . Uppie . . .

(UPPIE *hastily goes into the bedroom, and returns in a moment, holding the doors shut behind her, and communing with herself, to* TOM'S *open-mouthed agitation.*)

UPPIE

'*They run to and fro, and are at their wits' end.*' . . . Wait . . . let me think. . . . Are the doctors gone?

TOM

Yes'm.

UPPIE

'*They mount up to heaven, they go down again to*

the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble.' . . . The sunlight is here. She wants to be out of that room. I must take it on myself. . . . And I will. She's that much heartier to-day. . . . Thank God. (*She opens the door.*) Thank God! (*More loudly.*)

MARY'S *voice*

Why, is that Tom? . . . Opie's Tom? . . .

UPPIE

(*on the threshold*)

Don't be calling, my dearie. Yes, it is Tom; and he will help us. — I am coming.

(*She reënters with an armful of pillows, moves the sofa a bit and opens a screen behind it to keep off any draught.* TOM *follows her, awe-struck, to the bedchamber.*

They return carrying MARY *on their crossed hands. Her arms are round their necks, and she is smiling faintly. Her hair is loosely tied in her neck, in girlish fashion; she is wrapped in a bed-gown of pale color. They lay her with great care against the cushions of the sofa, her back towards her bedroom door; and spread a coverlet over her.*)

MARY

(*smiling back at them as one refreshed*)

How good to be here again . . . out of that room! . . . And roses . . . . Who sent them?

UPPIE

Roses everywhere, — upstairs and down. Mr. Opie sent these. . . . You could not have so many in your own room, dear. (*As if she were talking to a child.*) You shall rest awhile with these, quite by yourself and no one else. (*Looking at* TOM.) And there's the sun. . . .

MARY

And . . . and is there any message from Amelia?

UPPIE

The poor lamb is in Norwich. She does n't know you've been sore ill.

MARY

Mrs. Inchbald? . . . But . . . no. — Mrs. Siddons? . . .

UPPIE

No more words, my dearie. Sleep, if you can. Sleep, now.

MARY

(*pointing to the cradle*)

Oh, she is here? (*Eagerly.*)

UPPIE

Don't go on about her, dearie, or I shall have to take her away again.

MARY

No, no! — Oh, not while we are so quiet. Let me have her nearer. . . . We'll both sleep, then . . . maybe. — I'll be good. (*They move the cradle near her; and lift the veil from it: she looks.*) Fast asleep. . . .

(*Waves her hand: and nestles back obediently. Her eyes close.* UPPIE *looks at her closely; then signs to* TOM *and touches her lips. She whispers in* TOM'S *ear and points to corridor-door, right. Exit* TOM. UPPIE *withdraws by the upper door, left.* MARY *opens her eyes, and, turning her head with little motion, sees that she is alone. She reaches out and stirs the cradle very softly; gathers strength, parts the curtains, and reaches her outstretched hand within; showing her great weakness.*)

MARY

(*as if she expected an answer*)

My girl-child? . . . I believe we are defeated, after all. — Defeat. . . . This heaviness . . . this is defeat. . . . My girl-child . . . what will you be? . . . Something solitary? Be Something for us . . . be something . . . steadfast. . . .

(*Reënter* UPPIE, *watchfully*)

UPPIE

Dearie, what is this talking?

MARY

I'm talking to my daughter, Uppie.

UPPIE

But you must n't be talking to your daughter. Let me take her with me. She's sleeping soundly. Yes, I'll move her into the next room. . . . Do you rest quiet now.

(*She moves out the little cradle, left; returns, pours out a glass of wine and gives it to* MARY, *who drinks a mouthful with listless obedience; then reaches her arms out, as far as she can, towards the windows.*)

MARY

(*a little troubled*)

I cannot dip my hands in the sun. — The days are grown much shorter, Uppie.

(*Her eyes close again.*)

UPPIE

It's September, you see, my dearie: — ma'am. — Mid-September, autumn like. I'll open one. . . .

(*Goes to the window. Pauses, with her hand on the casement, and looks out with interest. — Thrusts her head out and concentrates her gaze on some one below. — Looks back at* MARY *who does not notice her. — Listens a moment: — then moves towards the door, right, just as* TOM *opens it from outside.*)

TOM

(*on the threshold, to* UPPIE)

What be I to do? . . . It's a gentleman wants to see her . . . Mrs. Godwin . . . that's all he said. 'I've come to see Mrs. Godwin.' . . . Looks to be a kind of clergyman . . . Dissenting; by his Hat. . . . Something like a Quaker, you might call it.

UPPIE

(*with solemn triumph*)

The Lord be praised! A man of God. . . . 'T is His own doing; and none of mine. Bid him come in, softly; not to wake Mr. Montague there in the drawing-room. — Bid him come up. — Don't 'ee be giving this word to any other living creature. (*Exit* TOM.) Some one must have sent for him. A man of God.

(*Settles* MARY'S *coverlet; sets a chair facing her, towards the centre of the room. — Advances towards the corridor-door as* SYMES *enters. He halts, once inside the room, and listens in evident bewilderment as she speaks to him, with an eager respect, looking intently at him. His dress is markedly severe; he turns — with some nervousness — a Quaker hat in his hands.*)

UPPIE

(*softly*)

Will it please you step in, Sir. . . . I'm sure she will be very much cheered to see you, Sir; very much cheered.

(*With some agitation, she moves the chair towards him, and then hurriedly makes her exit up, closing the door after her.*

MARY, *startled by the sudden action of all this, opens her eyes widely. As she recognizes* SYMES, *she sits higher against the cushions; and a moment's shock of surprise comes into her face.*

SYMES' *eyes rest upon her; and a similar shock comes into his own fixed gaze: — amazement, realization, grief. — A look of humility comes over* MARY; *she sinks back against the cushions, and spreads her hands out with a gesture of meekness, looking back at him. When she speaks, it is with a strain of stoicism and growing strength in her voice.*

SYMES *makes a sudden movement towards her, convention melting under the stress of his feeling.*)

SYMES
(*almost indignantly*)

What does this mean?

MARY
(*shaking her head slowly*)

Mr. Symes. — Do not be disturbed.

SYMES

I was told to come upstairs. . . . I had no idea of

this. . . . Can you forgive it? You are ill. — No one told me.

MARY

(*smiling*)

They thought the whole world must know . . . the whole of our little distress. . . . Perhaps . . . my Uppie . . . thought. . . .

SYMES

Shall I call her?

MARY

(*more firmly*)

No. — I see now, what she thought. . . . I beg you, stay. . . . You have taken orders, Mr. Symes?

SYMES

(*looking vaguely at his hat*)

No . . . not exactly. — But (*with passionate concern*) . . . I can see you have been very ill.

(*He approaches and sits down near her.*)

MARY

Yes . . . Let us talk together a little. Words of understanding, — are they not the most pre-

cious of all ministrations? She took you (*smiling*) for a man of some Church; and it seemed well to her that you should be here. . . . Do not let that distress you. For I wish to talk. — And how strangely we seem to meet, at long intervals; and at moments that make us see, in the midst of noise, or of stillness, — how fast the Earth is journeying round the Sun. . . . (*He looks back at her immovably, rapt in her face and her words.*) I think there is a destiny in it. For the first time, to-day, I have been left alone. (*She looks towards the table: he rises, pours out more wine and brings it to her. She drinks of it, like a child, and he sets back the glass and sits again, still watching her.*) Pray be at ease. I have come back but newly from the doors . . . of birth and death. Should not that make us simple? And one can look both ways, for a time . . . (*Laughs faintly.*) The doors are both . . . open. (SYMES *puts by his hat on the table; and stands, looking back at her.*) . . . I thought . . . the Friends . . . as the Americans call them, did not take off their hats to monarchs or to magistrates, friend Symes; or yet to women.

(*He resumes his seat, smiling. Youth emerges from his formal manner, as her spell lays*

hold of him. But he listens always with passionate intentness and a certain strength of cheer, regardful of her feebleness.)

SYMES

I am not yet a Quaker; but always a Friend, Mary Wollstonecraft. You gave me that title. I have been trying to widen my mind to hold the meaning it might have. So, with your help, I am finding . . . my religion.

MARY

My help? Oh, say all. You strengthen me, more than that wine.

(*She pushes herself higher against the pillows.*)

SYMES

Ought I to speak with you? You are too gentle to say Go. . . . And yet, I know, you lover of the truth, — and so compassionate, you must be happier . . . for words spoken from that brink of birth and . . . God forbid it —

MARY

(*tranquilly*)

Death.

SYMES

Dare I ask —

MARY

My child is living. . . . She is well.

SYMES

(*simply*)

I have never come so near to these mysteries.

MARY

Nor I . . . before. These depths, friend, that I know now, have taken me to the uttermost, under the world. — Why do I talk so to you? . . . I know.

SYMES

Because we are almost strangers. No. . . . You are the friend I meet only on the edge of a cloud; where searchers find out simpleness and things abiding; where there is neither 'marrying nor giving in marriage'. . . (*smiling wanly*).

MARY

(*smiling back with sudden confidence*)

It is so. — And neighbor, I may not ask them

here, — I've tried their souls so far — with all this watching. . . . Is this Defeat?

SYMES
(*warmly*)

Defeat?

MARY

This irony: — that I, who tried to burn my own heart as a little rush-light for the truth, — that I must go out . . . empty-handed, and that light . . . despised?

SYMES

Despised?

MARY

And leave all undone; again, again: blank. — For those little unknowing, helpless hands of my child? And I cannot even tell her, poor new-born, the bitter wisdom from my simpleness! . . . It's all so simple. . . . He does not yet know that.

SYMES

He?

MARY
(*simply*)

Godwin. . . . So tender, now. Yet he knows

nothing of the source of that tenderness. Oh, if one rose from the dead, yet would he not believe. It is too simple! — But hearken, you new friend. I'm thankful for the more that I have learned. I tried, you see, to fill my little life with what I thought full measure of truth and love. . . . But when we call on truth, it over-runs, — it over-fills, — it overwhelms; it is so much greater than we understand. It poured on me; and I was only human. — As I told you once, I plunged to the very deep . . . of despair. I thought that was death.

SYMES

Do not think of that.

MARY

Out of that pitiful life, I died, truly. . . . But when I crept about again, a humbler spirit, I was much younger; and meeker; more a little child.

SYMES

(*gently*)

Strange hero; always with the heart of a child for innocence of this terrible world.

MARY

(*shaking her head slowly*)

Even the New World, as we called it once . . . is no new world. — This is my trouble. Keep it for me, friend. You know when people . . . are ill and . . . very weak, sometimes they say true things, much truer; and the others think it is only their weakness speaking. . . . Will he think that? — Godwin? . . . This is all so late. . . . Must I be only a defeated woman-thing? After all? — A woman-voice crying in the wilderness? — Dead . . . of her woman-child? —

(*Leans back suddenly, exhausted.*)

SYMES

(*rising, and speaking strongly to her*)

You? Oh, never dream such words. This is the edge of a cloud. And I see you as a soul in the vanguard of all souls that strive after light and liberty. We have not reached them yet; — nor in poor France; nor in the New World over there, be sure! But you, you lead me now; can you not feel it? You have opened a way before me, more than I ever dreamed one soul could show another, *you*, solitary woman; a way, and a strength. — I may tell you now, in forthright

words. I saw you first with man's eyes; man's love, it may be. But I did not understand that love; I had no words to tell it. I desired to shelter you; whose Beauty sheltered me. — I lost you; and I followed, and could not turn away. And losing you, I followed that wistful flame in your eyes that followed Something. — I lost you in human grief when the waves went over you. I could hardly bear it that my pioneer was spent and torn in briary ways of hardship. Still she went on before me, unconquerable, through griefs men cannot know, all herself, and only herself, and her sacrifices. She led me out of myself . . . out of my small contents . . . out of my low dwelling.

MARY

A pioneer?

SYMES

A torch; forever. . . . Yes, we do learn more than we would; we have more than we ask. We knock, and dare not enter. Because there opens before us —

MARY

Life, — forever going on; and we — so little and

so young! . . . You comfort me. . . . These were good human words, such as I have dreamed there should be, between men and women, and all toil-worn creatures breaking their bread together. . . . You must go?

SYMES

I bless your tender mercy. — They would be vexed indeed, I fear, if they knew.

MARY
(*meekly*)

Yes.

(*A streak of sunlight reaches, lower and farther, from the casement window.* SYMES *sees it, and in response to her unuttered wish, goes up and opens the window to let in more.*)

SYMES

But again, when you are stronger.

MARY

Go, dear friend. . . . You have given me new heart.

SYMES

I?

MARY

For the high adventure. — Heart to journey through . . . alone.

(SYMES, *coming down towards her, folds back the screen so that the light may reach her as she wishes, bringing into view, nearly, a small stand with the hour-glass upon it. Neither observes it. She reaches out her hand to him; and with an effort to conceal his emotion, he comes close and bends his forehead upon it for a moment; then lays it back upon the other.*)

SYMES

Beautiful hand, stay by the other, close; till she be strong. (*He turns to the door, right.*)

MARY

They bless you, both. — (*Exit* SYMES.) Ah, sunset! —

(*Turning, restlessly, she sees the hour-glass. — She regards it for a moment and then takes it in her hands and looks at it stoically. — Below, in the street, there is the sound of fiddle and harp, suddenly, in preliminary strain, as of the street-singers in*

Act II. — She looks up and listens. A mellow voice sings:

'Drink to me only with thine eyes
And I will pledge with mine. . . .
Or leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine.'

She struggles to sit up; and reaches the hour-glass back upon the stand; so that the sand trickles; — and as the song goes on, she stretches out her hands, both, into the long sun-ray that touches her, just before it goes out.

'The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine:
But might I of Love's nectar sip,
I would not change for thine.'

The song stops and the players move on. The bedroom door opens and UPPIE *re-enters hastily, agitated.)*

UPPIE

(*drawing near to look closely at her, sees her lying back with closed eyes*)

Ah! . . . Say you're not worse, dearie! Say

you're not worse! I must have gone asleep. . . . I should n't have let you have your own way. But . . . no; it was not wrong. It was not wrong. — Boy! (TOM *appears in the doorway.*) Quick, to her bed. . . . Before Mr. Godwin comes. . . . He's very long away.

MARY

(*opening her eyes and repeating*)

He is . . . very long . . . away.

(*The two fold her robe about her, lift her tenderly from the couch, and carry her into the bedroom. A second later, her voice is heard murmuring deliriously — 'Cold — cold — cold' . . .*

Enter GODWIN *from the corridor, freshened with outer air. He enters, throws off his coat, and looks about, responding suddenly to some change in the room.*)

GODWIN

Mary! — They moved you . . . (*Agitated.*) Why are there no candles? Uppie, Uppie! —

(UPPIE *reënters with a candle from which she lights two or three.* GODWIN *watches her, with a childlike awe; he sees the cushions,*

the couch, the flowers, and unconsciously follows UPPIE *as she lights, last of all, a tall candle on the stand beside the hour-glass. — He points to it, and says in a high, excited voice —)*

Who turned the glass? Who turned the glass? (*As* UPPIE *stands austerely silent and brushes away the tears from her eyes, he makes a gesture of penitence, standing by the couch.*) Oh, I . . . I am foolish. . . . Uppie . . . (*timidly.*) (UPPIE *turns.*) Uppie . . . Elizabeth. Tell me, — before I see her. What do you truly think of your mistress? . . . How is she, Uppie? What do you think?

UPPIE

(*controlling her grief*)

She's going fast, Sir . . . She's going . . .

GODWIN

(*with a cry between rage and anguish*)

Ah, — no, no! —

(*He clenches the hour-glass at arm's length for an instant, regarding it with superstitious hatred — dashes it violently on the ground; and covers his face with his two hands.*)

UPPIE

(*straightening her apron like a rustic Fate, looks at him with woe and pity, as he stands. Then she speaks with inflexible resignation*)

That can do no help, Sir. We can't measure things like that; and we can't destroy them if we would. Not Time, nor Life, nor Death. — They go on, Sir.

CURTAIN

Epilogue

A late July afternoon, 1814.

Scene: Mr. William Godwin's *Study, in Skinner Street. — It is a large room, subdued in color, with a softened shabbiness; and books everywhere. At back, centre, a fireplace and mantel. Over this, the portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft. To right and left of the fireplace, doors; the one to the right opening on an outer corridor. Down, to the left, an inner door. — Windows to the left, with curtains half-drawn, letting in a low summer light. Down, right, the same long couch seen in Act III. Left, near the windows, a large table strewn with papers, and a scrap-basket full of them to overflowing; some on the floor.*

There is a knock at the outer door; then a pause. The door opens slowly.

Enter Mary Godwin, *with resolute dignity, followed by* Shelley, *whose air is similarly firm, but calmer. He is a tall, radiant looking*

youth, with roughish, upstanding hair and luminous eyes. His hat is in his hands, and he looks before him clearly into the room, over MARY'S *head.*

MARY *is a very fair girl of sixteen; pale and tense at present, and wholly unconscious of her youth. They enter, one at a time, and close the door.*

SHELLEY
(*decisively*)

He is not in the house.

MARY

He is never in the house for me, these late days. I was foolish to be frightened. . . . But if you had seen him yesterday . . .

SHELLEY

Mary, I saw him just three days ago. . . . This means the end. For us, the Beginning. Take it as an answer, if you still need any beyond what your own heart tells you. (*Ardently.*) I do not. (*She looks up at him with worship.*) You have tried to write him.

MARY

To write him! . . . (*She comes down towards the*

scrap-basket and points to the strewings there, looking closely.) Percy! . . . He will not read a word.

SHELLEY

It is a vision of parental tyranny at its worst. He will no longer speak with me. And what more have we to ask? . . . We love each other. That is our answer to the rest of Life! Your father is no longer capable of living up to his own teachings, my Life. — You see that. (*She nods assent.*) His close, personal point of view has blinded him to the doctrines he was born to teach . . . and we were born to uphold! But we two together, we will be true to them till he shall return to himself. Don't be so grieved, my dearest one. In time, he will come to know us, as we know ourselves.

MARY

Oh, if I could hope that!

SHELLEY

Believe it, Darling. Must I remind you of your own father's teachings? . . . Yes, . . . (*resolutely*) for I am still his faithful disciple, though

he be absent from himself. It is unthinkable to-day, he is the same man who wrote, without blenching, '*Marriage is law, and the worst of all laws*'. . . he who could fail so utterly to understand me when I told him our resolve. . . . But think lovingly of him; and I will try to do so, Mary. He has taught us better than he knows. I'll go now, and leave you these last few hours. — Be firm, my Soul. — I trust you. (*She looks at him glowingly.*) . . . Give him all your thoughts, this little while. Write him, if you will, that I, — I love him too. He is your Father! For to-day. — But to-morrow, Mary!

MARY

To-morrow!

SHELLEY

Will be all . . . all ours! . . . We have a world to save. — And you . . . have me.

(*Exit, by the outer door. They exchange one look, of breathless expectancy.*

Once alone, MARY *slips off her wide hat with sudden relief.—While she does so, the upper left-hand door opens, to admit* UPPIE; *an older* UPPIE, *a trifle formal in her dress,*

and very melancholy. MARY *throws her hat on the couch; following it, carefully, with her armful of books, folding some green leaves in their pages. She runs her fingers over her hair with a deep sigh; and turns to catch sight of* UPPIE'S *watchful silence. — Her start of surprise shows her overwrought state of mind and body.*)

MARY

Uppie! . . . Why did n't you speak?

UPPIE

(*coming down, her eyes still mournfully fixed on* MARY)

Miss Mary . . . You're wearied out.

MARY

(*about to deny it, but giving in to* UPPIE'S *gentleness*)

Oh . . . Yes, you are right. I think I must be. But it's stifling here. How can you keep the room so dark this day?

UPPIE

'T is the worst day of July that's been down on

London these twenty years, the paper'll be saying; and cooler with the curtains drawn. . . . You look fair dizzied with it, Miss Mary. I wonder . . . I really do . . . at you going off such a length . . . *to walk* . . . (*searchingly*).

MARY
(*quickly*)

'T was only to St. Pancras . . . you know why; the churchyard is full of shade.

(*She looks up at her mother's portrait.* UPPIE'S *gaze follows hers. She takes a step nearer to the girl's small drawn-up figure, and her voice softens further. — She smoothes a frill of* MARY'S *fichu with the speechless familiarity of devotion and says, doggedly:*)

UPPIE

In the simmering heat! . . . You look all of a fever; . . . a slow fever (*solemnly*) and I suppose it will be that same Mr. Shelley kept you there . . . talking hour on hour. (*Half to herself, sincerely.*) 'Save and deliver me out of the hand of strange children, whose mouth talketh vanity; — and their right hand —'

(MARY *with sudden playfulness puts her*

hand over UPPIE'S *mouth; then kisses her forehead.*)

MARY

(*as if confidence were a forbidden delight*)
Mr. Shelley . . . loves the Sun!

UPPIE

(*drily*)

Perhaps that's what ails him . . . I've heard of such: people losing their wits with staying too much in it: . . . and going round without a hat, too. (MARY *laughs.*) He's no right, nor any man, to keep young heads a-simmering 'longside of him such an afternoon, in or out of *any* churchyard.

(*Turns and peers inquiringly at the portrait as if for approval.*)

MARY

Oh, Uppie, . . . Mr. Shelley is a genius; a very great man. —

UPPIE

(*with sudden ire*)

A great man! Him, a long-legged boy, twenty years old! —

MARY

(*with dignity*)

Twenty-two years old. . . . And he has had terrible, bitter experience (*with awe and pity*) in that short life.

UPPIE

(*searchingly*)

His wife, you mean.

MARY

(*nodding candidly*)

We must not speak of it, Uppie.

UPPIE

Men don't have to live long for such bitter experiences; — nor to leave 'em all behind.

MARY

(*with sudden fire*)

Oh, Uppie! Uppie! . . . Is it not enough that my father should so disown his own teachings, his own Disciple . . . for Mr. Shelley is one . . . that was how we met him! — That he should suddenly turn so intractably cold-hearted; deaf to reason; blind to all the . . . the great principles we were *reared* upon! . . . But . . .

(UPPIE *softens and folds her arms around the*

girl; looking over her nestling head, with a vain appeal to the portrait.)

UPPIE

Your cheeks are burning. You are n't yourself, . . . my lamb. I'll make you some tea. (MARY *shakes her head.*) No? — Rest you here, then. . . . I wish Miss Fanny were home. — Your father 's out.

MARY

(*suddenly*)

Of course he's out! . . . How he does behave lately, Uppie. Like a . . . like a cross lost child. Whatever I do . . . or try to say. But it's I that am the lost child, Uppie. Oh, you can see. It's too bad for you to wait on me: you, here for just that little city visit. You should be resting. — (*They come down, together.*)

UPPIE

It's sore-hearted I am to be going home and leave you here. But, so as I value God's word, my lamb, I never could please (*in a loud whisper*) . . . the present Mrs. Godwin.

MARY

Nor can I. — You see that.

UPPIE

(*comfortingly*)

I see that. . . . But look back now . . . to your own mother, your own mother, as Mr. Opie, God rest his soul! — painted her.

MARY

Oh, I've been looking and listening, Uppie. . . . Forgive me, I can't talk now. My head aches so.

UPPIE

Rest you here, (*pointing to the couch*) — just here where I've seen herself, many's the time.

(*As she goes to draw the curtains*, MARY *touches the cushions with a childish affection, and takes her place on the couch.*)

MARY

(*with a burst of longing*)

Oh, *you* talk to me about her, Uppie. Just about her . . . I'm so *mothersick*. — Yes, tell me the very end, again.

UPPIE

(*firmly lifting* MARY's *two little feet upon the sofa, and sitting beside her, and smoothing her forehead*)

And I, telling you more than ever I should! . . .

Well, so, my lamb. — (God be our help.) We had taken you and your cradle out of the room; and we left her to sleep a bit, quite alone. For there was little care on most of us, those few small hours. . . . (*She looks at* MARY, *and goes on in a lower voice, as she strokes her hand regularly.*) . . . Little care, for those few hours. Sixteen years ago; only Sixteen. . . . Ah, the fine little child you were. . . . But just as your father came in again, I heard her say those words we were in dread of. . . .'Cold . . . cold,' and that was the beginning of the end. . . . Then, 'Uppie,' he says to me . . . the poor man. . . . (*She looks closely at* MARY'S *face.* MARY *is asleep.*) Poor lamb! —

(*She softly withdraws to the window, draws the curtains close to darken the room; and goes out, with a backward look.*

A last thread of sunlight touches the portrait of MARY *over the fireplace; crosses the canvas and moves down the dark room towards her sleeping Daughter. The portrait is left dim.*

Behind the couch the faint ray of light defines the Appearance,—shining with grace and a beauty of strange youth,

younger than the portrait — of Mary Wollstonecraft, smiling upon her child. — She wears the dress that OPIE *has painted; and the same soft binding on her hair. The Daughter, in her sleep, sits up, slowly and with wide-open eyes, to look at her; in wonder, incredulity, quick comfort. Their faces light with unspeakable tenderness. When* MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT *speaks, it is in a voice of youth without a cloud; tranquil to ecstasy.*)

DAUGHTER

Mother! . . . Mother! . . .(MARY'S *look replies with radiance.*) Mother! . . . Where were you? Why did you never answer?

MARY

Do you hear me at last . . . my own?

DAUGHTER

All these days that I have been *praying* to you, . . . Mother, where were you?

MARY

You did not hear me, Child.

DAUGHTER

Not hear you! . . . Beside your grave, Mother. My cheek upon your grave!

MARY

I cannot remember my grave, dear one. I am not there, ever.

DAUGHTER

I knew . . . you could not answer. . . . But, oh! I prayed to *you* . . . to know . . . the right.

MARY

We are not all-wise, my darling. We grow, and grow. We are all so young in this world; much younger than we ever dreamed ourselves. All living things grow on: in life and youth.

DAUGHTER

And . . . Love . . . lasts forever?

MARY

Love lasts forever.

DAUGHTER

(*like a rapturous child*)

I was sure! . . . But . . . Mother . . .

MARY

Love changes; as we change.

DAUGHTER

(*with dread in her voice*)

Love changes?

MARY

As we change; and grow. — Is my love for you . . . changed?

DAUGHTER

(*comforted*)

No! No!

MARY

(*playfully*)

Or yours, for me?

DAUGHTER

It grows, — it grows!

MARY

I bathe in it; I shine with it; we shine upon each other. It is our one clear speech and understanding. — The one all souls would have. . . . You are troubled yet, my Darling?

DAUGHTER

Am I? . . . Yes, yes. Surely you know all? . . . It is . . . Shelley, Mother.

MARY

Who is Shelley?

DAUGHTER

Mother, not know him! . . . How can that be? Dearest, he worships you.

MARY

So close, you say? . . . (*serenely*) And I see only you. . . . It is some one you love.

DAUGHTER

(*simply*)

Yes. . . . And yet . . . How can Love . . . change?

MARY

Love may be lost. . . .

DAUGHTER

(*with a shade of dismay*)

Lost? . . .

MARY

Lost . . . in a deeper Love. And the way may

lead through bitter grief in that world; only, we cannot feel the bitterness again, once we are grown. Love fills us with new understanding. Love cannot be all contained in one small human heart. Sometimes it breaks that heart, — to overflow.

DAUGHTER

Oh, Mother, is that the answer?

MARY

We are the answer; we ourselves; and Life in us, that grows.

DAUGHTER

I am strong again; I am strong! . . . Only one word. —

MARY

(*fading a little*)

— And Joy is never lost; save in a greater joy. —

DAUGHTER

Oh, what a word I have to tell them now! — Would they believe it?

MARY

(*smiling*)

Dream can grow small again. You will forget.

DAUGHTER

No, I will be your torch-bearer! — It is the world forgets. . . . It even forgets you, Mother. Do you know? Do you care?

MARY

(*happily; and brightening*)

I, too, was blindfold once, blindfold with time!

DAUGHTER

(*reaching out her arms*)

Breathe on me! Fold me in! — To think I sprang from you!

MARY

Beloved . . . You are happy now?

DAUGHTER

So happy!

MARY

(*she seems to be going, with a constant backward look*)

And be strong. —

DAUGHTER

One question . . . Mother . . . wait! . . . I feel it beating. . . .

MARY

We shall be young together, you and I.

(*A door outside bangs heavily. The light and the vision are gone in darkness for a moment. . . . When the room emerges into its twilight,* MARY *is seen lying asleep as at first. — She opens her eyes, sits up bewildered, and puts the hair back from her forehead. She looks refreshed; but mindless of the dream.*

Reënter UPPIE, *cautiously. She comes down.* — MARY *rises.*)

UPPIE

You'd better run upstairs and freshen yourself, Miss Mary. — Your father's back, earlier . . .

MARY

Yes. (*Gathers up her hat and the books beside her.*) . . . You were right, dear. I've been asleep, I think. I feel much cheerier; much stronger. And one thing, I promise you. Father shall read the next letter I write him, Uppie: yes, even if he hunts up the pieces, to put them together again!

(*Points across at the scrap-basket, and goes*

towards the door, down, left. —UPPIE *looks vengefully at the scrap-basket.* — MARY *stopping suddenly for a backward look, sets down her belongings on the nearest table; and running like a child to* UPPIE, *throws her arms around her and clings to her for an instant; then hurriedly catches up her armful again. She goes out by the door, down, left, just as* WILLIAM GODWIN *enters, from the street, hat in hand.* — *He is now a man of middle-age, distinguished-looking, but of coldish mien; his hair is fully gray.*

He walks in with an air of severe abstraction; comes down to the table by the window, and mail in hand, opens the letters, as if his mind were elsewhere. Most of them he tears through, once or twice, and adds contemptuously to the débris in the waste-basket, giving scant attention to UPPIE *when she speaks with him.*

UPPIE *observes him with cold heaviness of manner, standing immovably for a moment. Then she speaks.*)

UPPIE

If I may make so bold, Mr. Godwin . . . I was

wishing to tell you, Sir . . . without seeming to interfere. In clearing up Miss Mary's writing-table . . . in her room, Sir, this noon . . .

(GODWIN'S *attention is caught, in spite of his efforts to discard her.*)

GODWIN

(*with a note of exasperation*)

Yes, Elizabeth?

UPPIE

I never presume, Sir . . .

GODWIN

Certainly not. What did you . . . what was . . .

UPPIE

Oh, very gratifying to you, Sir, I'm sure, — I could n't help noticing. . . . There was such a heap of papers torn in two, Sir, and I had to take them up; — they were all beginnings to yourself, Sir. (GODWIN *turns to stone with stubborn disapproval.*) 'My dear Father,' and . . . and 'Dearest Father'. . . and then, that was all, Sir, . . . (*coaxingly*) '*Father dearest.*' . . .

GODWIN

Not communicating any striking fact, Elizabeth, save to intricate observation.

UPPIE

I could n't help thinking, Sir, although I never do . . . that for a young lady to sit up all night . . . beginning letters to her own father . . . and him in his own house, along with his own daughter; it might be something was on her mind, Sir. . . . It will hardly be for practice, Sir. Miss Mary's handwriting was always —

(GODWIN *utters an inarticulate expression of impatience, and resumes his destruction of the mail.*)

GODWIN

Whatever it is about, Elizabeth, I shall unquestionably learn in due time. (*As she lingers in evident concern*) However, I thank you. I am glad to hear it. Miss Mary has at times seemed to me unduly impulsive. This indicates that she is now moved to subject her impulses to a rational examination by communicating them to paper . . . for my counsel. . . . I thank you, Elizabeth. . . . (*Spending his wrath on a few*

more pamphlets, he adds between his teeth) I think I have told you several times, you need not save for me any of these . . . Tracts. My mail is cumbersome enough.

UPPIE

Tracts, Sir?

GODWIN

Sermons, pamphlets, tracts. (*Holding up a paper and reading its title with biting scorn.*) 'LOVE DIVINE: Our Fountain of Youth.' . . . Symes!

UPPIE

(*bewildered*)

Symes? . . . (*coming forward*) Symes! Let me look, Sir.

GODWIN

(*irritably*)

Symes. — The name is nothing. Look at the title. — 'LOVE DIVINE: . . . Our Fountain of Youth!' — (*Tears it up.—As she moves heavily away, he looks after her with some compunction.*) I shall be going out again, presently, Uppie. . . . If you will be good enough to clear away these waste papers then, I . . . thank you, Uppie.

(*She goes out.*)

GODWIN, *following her steps, pauses before*

the portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft, raising his hands, clinched with intense feeling, for a moment, towards her averted gaze. —

GODWIN

Ah, . . . Mary! . . . If you could only tell me. If you were only . . . Anywhere. If I could only be the fool my heart is. — If I might only come to that mirage, — and we be young, together!

(*He picks up his hat again and goes out. Reënter* UPPIE. *She comes down mechanically towards the scrap-basket, murmuring.*)

UPPIE

'Waste-papers,' says he. . . . And 'waste men,' say I.

(*She stoops to pick up from the floor various strewings from* GODWIN'S *hasty hand, shaking her head, and quoting solemnly,*

'And some . . . fell by the wayside.'

Exit UPPIE *carrying the scrap-basket, heavily. Reënter softly, by the lower door,* MARY. *Her hat and mantle are hanging on her arm. She holds against her bosom a letter, and*

hovers a moment above her father's table with it; then changes her mind.

Turning towards her Mother's portrait, she goes up slowly, closer and closer to it, clasping the letter. She lifts her face wistfully an instant; then she pushes before the fireplace a low ottoman, and mounts it. She spreads her arms wide, to the sides of the frame, lays her cheek against the canvas, and kisses it. — Then she steps down, looking back.)

MARY

Darling, . . . Good-bye.

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